

Researchers suggest cultural outreach prevents social exclusion

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Credit: Kai Lehtikoinen

Even though the majority of Finnish youth are thriving, some of them are wrestling with a host of problems. Studies find that 14% of Finns born in 1987 hadn't completed any degrees within nine years after

completing the nine-year comprehensive school starting at the age of seven. Some of them have faced wellbeing and health related challenges: every third of them have either been given a psychiatric diagnosis or taken psychiatric medications. As for Finns born in 1997, there is no indication that the numbers will change for the better.

Despite the excellent reputation of the Finnish school system, some schoolchildren in Finland struggle with a lack of vision for the future. Some of them feel some degree of cynicism towards school already by the age of 13, and 15 percent regard school as completely insignificant for their future.

It's exactly these kinds of children and teenagers that could benefit from cultural outreach work, researchers of the ArtsEqual initiative suggest. Cultural outreach means providing children and teenagers the opportunity to participate in tailored [cultural activities](#) in cases where they otherwise wouldn't know how to get involved or wouldn't have access to the activities.

A Helsinki-based [pilot project](#) named SONGLAB, for example, involves teenagers who are interested in making music and who come from different backgrounds and provides them a low-threshold opportunity to compose, write lyrics, produce and release their own music together with other teenagers free of charge.

Other similar examples include the Floora project, in which children who had needed child welfare services were offered free instrument lessons in a music school. The [policy brief](#) also mentions a dance group assembled from nine-year-old boys who weren't selected to participate in the extended dance curriculum of a comprehensive school.

"Cultural participation enforces people's experiences of seeing the value of human life and finding life meaningful, and encourages us to take

action," says researcher Isto Turpeinen, one of the authors of the policy brief from the University of the Arts Helsinki (Uniarts Helsinki).

Cultural capital linked to a meaningful life

Numerous studies show that arts education and artistic activities boost learning, wellbeing, and development of social skills. Cultural capital has been linked to enhanced learning results, academic skills, and educational choices. In adult age, [cultural capital](#) is associated with social inclusion, wellbeing, and having an enjoyable and meaningful life.

"For the time being, only some of the positive effects associated with arts education, including prevention of social exclusion and increased wellbeing, are being realised. If art activities and arts education aren't available for everyone, we won't be able to fully utilise these possibilities," Turpeinen notes.

The purpose of cultural outreach is to increase the quality of living, strengthen a sense of community, support people's wellbeing, and thereby prevent social exclusion.

The ArtsEqual policy brief is available in Finnish under the title "Etsivä kulttuurityö lisää lasten ja nuorten kulttuurista osallisuutta" (Cultural outreach work increases children's and teenagers' cultural participation), and it has been written by professor Marja-Leena Juntunen, researcher Isto Turpeinen and doctoral candidate Hanna Kamensky from Uniarts Helsinki.

The six-year ArtsEqual initiative examines how art could increase social equality and wellbeing in Finland of the 2020s. It is coordinated by Uniarts Helsinki and funded by the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland. It is one of the biggest research initiatives in Finland in the field of arts.

More information: More information: <http://www.artsequal.fi>

Provided by University of the Arts Helsinki

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