

Open early childhood education and care in the city of Porvoo

Open early childhood education and care is part of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) services provided by the city of Porvoo. The purpose of the activities is to provide children living at home with ECEC in addition to home care as well as to support families with under-school-aged children. The National core curriculum for early childhood education and care also guides open ECEC. Open ECEC is available free of charge to families.

In Porvoo, open ECEC includes activities that children and parents can participate in together as well as club activities aimed only at children (aged 2–5 years old). The staff is qualified to implement the tasks carried out in ECEC. The first open day care centre began its operations in Porvoo in 1986. The activities have been expanded and developed into their current form since the mid-2000s.

Activities in open ECEC

Open ECEC provides families with children with meeting places and shared indoor and outdoor activities. The activities in Porvoo include family cafés, baby meetups (children under 2 years old with their parents) and play park activities. The customers' wishes are taken into account and the activities are also planned together with them. Special employees, such as a family counsellor and a special needs teacher in ECEC may visit the family cafés. The activities are organised in cooperation with other agents, such as a library. Cooperation is also carried out with educational institutions, e.g. by providing students with work placement opportunities. For instance, students taking Finnish courses visit Famili to practise the language in genuine situations.

Open ECEC also offers parents targeted peer groups providing guidance and supporting parenthood as well as interaction between the child and parent. The personnel are trained and have special competence in guiding these kinds of groups. Groups are also organised in cooperation with, e.g., a parish and social and health care staff.

The Perhepaikka Famili meeting place for families

Open ECEC has two independent units: Perhepaikka Famili, and Perhetupa Ilona in the city centre, in addition to which children's club activities are organised in the premises of day care centres. Open activities can also be organised in other spaces, such as a youth facility. In the evenings, the Famili premises are available free of charge for organisations and associations for families with children or groups of families with children set up by the inhabitants of the municipality. Other agents, such as the parish, also organise open activities to children and families. The aim is to coordinate the services together and organise annual events, such as ones aimed at



families taking place in different neighbourhoods.

In the autumn of 2019, Famili offers play park activities once per week and family cafés three times per week. Three different parent groups are guided every week. The family café provides parents with an opportunity to meet other families and build networks. In addition to activities and play, the children get to practise social skills with one another and the adults. The customers of the family café have access to a gymnasium and related equipment once per week.

The Famili meeting place for families began its operations in 2004. Its personnel engage in close regional cooperation with various agents to promote the welfare of residents and families with children. Each year, the city of Porvoo's family cafes and park activities have around 4,300 customers (number of visits/children and parents). Famili has around 2,000 customer visits/year.

Competent personnel

The personnel work with a family-oriented approach. Key working approaches used with children and adults include interactive support and a dialogue-based approach. For instance, an employee can provide a parent with a model for interacting with their child. Based on the situation, the topics the personnel can discuss with the parents include issues and questions related to parenting and development. Parents are encouraged in getting to know one another and building networks. They are also provided with information about different services, such as early childhood education and care, applying for a place at a day care centre, home services available for families with children, and family counselling.

Famili's customers include a lot of people with an immigrant background. Discussions on parenting and Finnish customs frequently take place with them. The Finnish language is practised together with the children and adults, which supports child-parent interaction. The aim is to support children's language and cultural skills to ensure that the child masters a small Finnish vocabulary (chair, colours, names of clothing, water etc.) e.g. before starting day care.