



Tuesday, May 6, 2014, 2:00-3:00 pm  
Repap Policy Room 1425  
3. Inspiring Local Communities for a Better Future

## Inspiring Local Communities for a Better Future

### **Social housing and communal work in the Finnish settlement movement**

Housing was a very important target of settlement work when the settlement movement first emerged. Housing conditions in the poor neighbourhoods where settlements were established left a great deal to be desired, and right from the beginning, settlements offered accommodation to both settlement workers and volunteers. Nowadays, settlement housing in Finland and its special features have become a major sector in settlement movement activity. Settlement housing services are diverse and cover the needs of different groups of residents by offering a variety of housing models. Using a selection of support measures, our objective is to create homes for people who are at different stages in their lives.

The housing services we provide allow us to implement our aims and our values in practice. One of these values is the belief that communality is an empowering force, strengthening equality and enabling everyone to live better lives. We believe it is important to work so that group activities become self-initiating and residents participate in influencing the services we offer. In this way, settlement housing strengthens the foundations of civic activity. It is also important that our housing services include multicultural housing environments as this encourages mutual tolerance and feelings of community.

Developing new forms of housing services is also important. For example, we are developing gender-sensitive methods in the housing support we offer young people. Senior citizens are offered the support of peer groups and other services.

"Still Going Strong Together" is a four-year project in settlement houses in which we are developing a training and action plan for providing peer support among people aged 60 or more. In this project, communal peer support for seniors is being developed locally through civic activity methods. We believe that building a good society is a team game. Older people are active and skilful. In good societies, the experience that older people have is put to good use – it is social sustainability. Cooperation and interaction between people of all ages drives development forward. Good housing and good societies need the perspective that older people offer.

Who are our residents? We offer housing to young and older citizens, to people with disabilities, and to people recovering from substance abuse or mental health problems. The spectrum is wide and for good reason: our aims are to strengthen people's sense of belonging, to help people cope with difficult life situations and prevent homelessness.

Housing services are provided in the rental apartments of local settlements and by the Finnish Federation of Settlement Houses' two companies. Our companies provide housing for people from all walks of life, but we make special provision for older people and people in transition or otherwise difficult life situations.

The special features of social housing management, supported housing and communal forms of housing encourage our residents to remain independent - they offer secure forms of living that include opportunities to participate in residents' activities and lead rewarding lives.

Open services, including low-threshold services, and volunteers support our housing services by organizing leisure-time and other activities. Residents are offered social rehabilitation and opportunities to engage in occupational rehabilitation.

### **The Finnish Federation of Settlement Houses and its companies**

The two companies owned by the Finnish Federation of Settlement Houses build and manage rental and right-of-occupancy apartments. These are primarily intended for people with small or moderate incomes, people living alone, people in urgent need of housing and individuals with a background of homelessness who need special assistance in connection with tenancy agreements. In our residential buildings, the housing services we provide are developed using the social housing management model. Every block of apartments has its own community worker who provides residents with support and encourages them to participate in communal activities. Each apartment block also has a "living room" where residents can meet and spend time together.

So what is our message? Walls and a roof are not enough if we want to provide people with good housing. Settlement housing enables residents to feel part of a community, to participate in group activities, enjoy peer support and security. Our residents also have the opportunity to influence their own futures.

### **Further information:**

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