



Peer support and expert by experience work in Helsinki`s mental and substance abuse services

# Content:

- About peer support and expert by experience work in general
- Peer support and expert by experience work in mental health & substance abuse services
- Aito Välittäjä - model in mental health services

# Peer support- and expert by experience work in general

- The aim of work is to improve services, strengthen participation, deepen understanding of recovery, change attitudes / reduce stigma, and support rehabilitation.
- The work is based on voluntariness, diversity, and multiple different voices
- A key part of the work is supporting the practitioner's own wellbeing while offering support to others with similar experiences.
- Peer support activities have long traditions: NGOs, community-based treatments, civic activism.
- Expert by experience work have developed in Finland since the 2000s: strategies (MIELI 2009), projects, NGOs.

# Peer support- and expert by experience work and the City of Helsinki

Peer support- and expert by experience work is practical tool in the City of Helsinki for promoting participation, equality, and non-discrimination.

The principles of participation and interaction are:

- Utilising the knowledge and expertise of individuals and communities
- Enabling independent activities
- Creating equal opportunities for participation

[Information about Participation in Helsinki](#)

The goal of the City's equality and non-discrimination plan for services is to promote non-discriminatory practices and ensure genuine accessibility for residents with diverse backgrounds and characteristics.

[Equality and non-discrimination plans 2022–2025](#)

# Peer support and expert by experience work in mental and substance abuse services

Collaboration with NGOs

Malmi Psychiatry and Substance Abuse Center:  
Expert by experience appointments, peer group facilitators, and Aito välittäjä activities

Substance abuse services of Jelpi: peer mentor

Statistics from 2024:  
Fee-for-service assignments: 81 individuals  
Volunteers: 13  
Work ability-promoting agreements & decisions: 18  
Symppis low-threshold inclusion-promoting work activities and peer support: 23

Laakso Psychiatry and Substance Abuse Center: Expert by experience appointments, peer group facilitators, and Aito välittäjä activities

Partnership House Harjula: Peer work

Symppis low-threshold day activity centre: low-threshold inclusion-promoting work activities and peer support

Vuosaari Health and Well-being Centre: Expert by experience appointments, peer group facilitators, and Aito välittäjä activities

Aurora Hospital area: Inpatient units activities; coffee meetings, Expert by experience appointments and groups, peer facilitators

Symppis low-threshold day activity centre: low-threshold inclusion-promoting work activities and peer support

Kalasadama Health and Well-being Centre: Expert by experience appointments, peer group facilitators, and Aito välittäjä activities, consultation for activation

Development tasks  
Management groups  
Co-development

# Peer support workers and experts by experience work in mental health and Substance Abuse Services alongside professionals

The role of peer support and experts by experience workers includes;

- Facilitating groups independently or together with a professionals
- Sharing their own recovery experience and guiding or accompanying service users to services and peer support groups.
- Peer support workers may also collaborate with professionals in client meetings or be available on inpatient units and in various lobby or shared spaces.
- Experts by experience participate in development work, for example in different working groups and workshops. Their expertise is also utilised in professional training days and in collaboration with educational institutions.
- Peer support and expert by experience roles can be carried out as volunteer work, as social welfare work activities (according to Section 27 e of the Social Welfare Act), rehabilitative work activities, work trials, fee-for-service assignments, and in cooperation with NGOs.

# Aito Välittäjä - model in mental health services

- Aito Välittäjä (“True mediator”) is a peer-based support model developed through co-creation between experts by experience, service users, and professionals. The model was piloted in the LOV ME project (2018–2019), which focused on strengthening positive mental health and recovery-oriented practices.
- Aito Välittäjät work alongside occupational therapists and other professionals.

Aito Välittäjä supports mental health service users by:

- being present, listening and offering companionship
- encouraging participation in meaningful activities
- helping service users find motivation (“the spark”) and confidence
- sharing relevant lived experience in a supportive way
- creating connections between people, services, and communities

# Aito Välittäjä in practice

- An occupational therapist suggests the model to a service user.
- A joint onboarding meeting is held.
- If cooperation begins, the Aito Välittäjä and service user can meet up to 15 times, 1–3 hours at a time.
- Activities are low-threshold, affordable and focused on the service user's interests, strengths and recovery goals.
- Communication practices, boundaries and confidentiality are agreed from the start.

## Role, boundaries and ethics

- Aito Välittäjät maintain confidentiality and do not record patient information.
- They encourage sobriety and do not visit service users' homes alone.
- If there are safety concerns, they inform the professional team.
- The model emphasises equal partnership, dignity, empowerment and recovery orientation.

## Support and supervision

- Aito Välittäjät receive monthly supervision, training, and wellbeing support.
- They work under an assignment agreement (not an employment contract).
- Compensation is 20 €/hour, and city-provided travel tickets are used.

The model is rooted in recovery principles: hope, empowerment, meaningfulness, social inclusion, person-centred goals

The impact of the Aito Välittäjä process is assessed together with the service user and occupational therapist. The assessment focuses on empowerment, social participation, confidence, and wellbeing

# Contact & more information

Hannimari Pihkanen  
Principal occupational therapist  
[hannimari.pihkanen@hel.fi](mailto:hannimari.pihkanen@hel.fi)

Tuula Samulin  
Expert by experience  
[tuula.samulin@hel.fi](mailto:tuula.samulin@hel.fi)

Joonas Munck  
Special planner  
[joonas.munck@hel.fi](mailto:joonas.munck@hel.fi)

Interestin links about expert by  
experience work:

## **The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL)**

Links are in finnish. You can use  
google translation on the sites.

[Experience knowledge](#)

[Recovery orientation](#)