

## **School environment - a crucial factor in promoting mental wellbeing of children and young people**

**Marjo Hannukkula, April 2018**

The Scottish and the Finnish school systems contain certain both unique and common characteristics in terms of history, culture and structure. In Scotland, the school path starts at the age of 5 whereas in Finland 2 years later. The population of the countries is about the same 5,5 million, and the size of one age class is the same as well c. 55 000. In addition, in both countries authorities have recognised the value and importance of enhancing mental wellbeing of children and young people and of preventing exclusion. This has resulted in decisions and legislation on the government level.

Scottish Government has a Minister of Mental Health and it has introduced a nation level Mental Health Strategy 2017 -2027. That is absolutely worth reading. <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00516047.pdf> In the strategy, the importance of promoting mental wellbeing and preventing exclusion is highlighted in the environments where children and young people live: home, kindergarten and school.

During my secondment, I was happy to learn more about education in Scotland <https://education.gov.scot/> and associations in Scotland which do valuable cooperation with schools to promote children`s and youths` mental wellbeing in that environment. <https://www.seemescotland.org/>; <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>; <https://www.samh.org.uk/>

Key to successful mental health promotion is that it is supported at a policy level. In Finland, national curriculum include mandatory health education subject and

mental health promotion in it in 1 to 9 levels. Mental health promotion is supported by the renewed "Law of Early education 2017", "National Curriculum 2014" and new "National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme 2017". All these policy level documents include mental health promotion.

[http://www.oph.fi/english/curricula\\_and\\_qualifications](http://www.oph.fi/english/curricula_and_qualifications)

The Finnish Association for Mental Health (FAMH), my employer, has done a long-term co-operation with The Ministry of Education and Culture and with The National Board of Education. The FAMH's expert has been a member in the both health education curriculum group (2004 and 2014). The appreciated role was to provide special expertise in the development of the curriculum, teacher training and teaching methods and deep understanding of mental health promotion and mental health skills. Furthermore, FAMH has established a long-term cooperation and development work with municipal education authorities and has implemented piloting processes with headmasters, teachers and school welfare officers.

The CRISP exchange program gave me the opportunity to be acquainted with brilliant professionals in children and young people in university and many associations here in Glasgow. Our shared understanding is that knowledge of mental health promotion must be provided also strongly to the teacher education at universities. Best arenas to promote mental health and to do anti-stigma work are the places and environments where children and young people spend their daily time such as kindergartens and schools. The best mental health promoters are firstly parents and then professionals like early educators and teachers working with children and young people. We need more holistic approach to promote children's and young peoples' mental health skills in the school context.

New evidence shows that mental health promotion is effective and every euro invested in promotional work will pay itself back 5-fold in less than three years (McDaid, 2017).

[http://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/315852/Policy-Brief-19-Investing-health-literacy.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/315852/Policy-Brief-19-Investing-health-literacy.pdf)