



# **Itla Children's Foundation Annual Report 2024**





Itla Children's Foundation promotes and supports the wellbeing, equality, position and good future of children, young people and families. We are building a child-friendly Finland by producing and processing information and innovations and organising training to support decision-making and develop services. Itla is an independent bridge-builder between research, practice and decision-making.

The annual report includes the activity report and financial statements for the period 1 January 2024–31 December 2024.

# Contents

Working together for the future of children	4
Highlights of the year	6
Annual report	
1 Itla's year 2024	8
1.1 CEO's review	9
1.2 Purpose and impact of activities	10
1.3 Kasvun tuki (Early Interventions)	12
1.4 Collective impact	15
1.5 Leadership training	18
1.6 Equal Start for Everyone – solutions to family and child poverty	19
1.7 Strategic research programme management and research projects	22
1.8 Communications and events	24
1.9 Grants and donations	25
2 Administration and personnel	26
3 Funding of the Foundation's activities	27
4 Outlook for 2025	28
Financial statements for the financial period 1 January–31 December 2024	30
Income statement and balance sheet	30

# *Working together for the future of children*

In recent years, there have been growing concerns about the divergence in children's wellbeing. Children and families being divided into those who are thriving and those who struggle with adversity is no longer a horror scenario; it is the reality in many regions. It is increasingly common that a child's future is determined by his or her starting points: where the family lives, what opportunities for support are available, and what kind of environment the child grows up in. This development is not a coincidence; it is the result of the choices made in our society.

Investing in early childhood education and basic education is essential if we want to ensure equal opportunities for children and lay the foundation for success in life. High-quality early childhood education and basic education are not a privilege but a right — for every child.

Cooperation with homes is more important than ever. The responsibility for raising a child does not lie with schools and day-care centres alone. Parents play a central role in setting boundaries and being a source of security for a child. Social media and the digital world bring challenges that require parents to be alert and provide guidance to their child. But how can families cope with these challenges if their resources are stretched thin?

The recent cuts in services for families with children have left their mark. Family and child poverty has increased, and more and more parents are struggling financially. The rise in unemployment brings uncertainty to daily life, which is also reflected on children. When parents worry about their financial situation, the atmosphere in the family becomes more tense and children's stress levels rise. The impacts are directly apparent in schools, day-care centres and other services: fatigue, concentration difficulties, anxiety and the threat of social exclusion.

The social climate has changed. In the past, the entire community supported families and children — an idea that was summarised by the phrase "it takes a village". These days, it feels like more and more people are focusing only on themselves. Even as expectations towards parenting increase, support from society is becoming weaker.

It is also important to recognise that a change for the better does not always require additional expenditure — sometimes it is only a matter of changing the operating culture. Could we recommit to the idea that children's wellbeing is a shared priority? Every adult can be a safe adult for a child — someone who will look them in the eye and ask them how they are doing.

We need to stop and ask ourselves this question: What kind of society do we want to build for our children?

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**Even as expectations towards parenting increase, support from society is becoming weaker.**



**Pia Hiltunen**  
*Chairperson of the Delegation*



# Highlights of the year

We contribute to a child- and family-friendly welfare society where children, young people and families of all kinds dare to dream and trust in a good future.

The redesigned itla.fi website was launched at the beginning of the year! The website's navigation, search tool and material bank were improved by the redesign.

Valuable input for the development of the 2030 vision for social and health services. Researchers, leaders, representatives of the third sector and practical professionals gathered at Itla to discuss the core question of Finland's future: what is needed to ensure the well-being of children and young people?

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

New online courses on the implementation of psychosocial methods and behavioural support in school and early childhood education gained popularity.

A record-high number of assessments of psychosocial interventions were under way: a total of 12 interventions were under assessment, most of which concerned updates to previous assessments to align them with the current assessment system.

The 10th anniversary of Early Interventions was celebrated in June! The "10 years of effective early interventions for children, young people and families" event featured experts in intervention and implementation research from Finland and abroad.

In evaluator training, 26 new evaluators were trained to assess interventions, nearly doubling the number of evaluators.

Equal Start for Everyone Oulu is a cooperation project between the City of Oulu and Itla, with a focus on promoting leisure activities for children and young people in collaboration with various operators. Itla carried out an assessment study on the pilot project in 2024. The results were published in December and are available on Itla's website.

The new Collective Impact website provides support, information and inspiration. Our Digital Collective Impact learning path is intended for everyone who wants to support children, young people and families through cooperation and fix the existing service system with a comprehensive approach.

Itla's new strategy, which was published in 2024, focuses our activities on a welfare society where children, young people and families can grow, thrive and actively participate in building the future. Our vision for the Finland of 2040 is a child- and family-friendly welfare society.

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

The third course of Childhood Builders Leadership Training graduated in September. The participants in the third course included heads of divisions and service directors from wellbeing services counties, as well as heads of education and directors of health and welfare from municipalities.

The Strategic Research Council's "PANDEMICS: Pandemics as a Challenge for Society" programme was concluded. The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic collected in the project are aimed at improving crisis preparedness and crisis management.

Researchers identified five models that explain the intergenerational transmission of poverty. At the international Cycle of Poverty event, decision-makers and researchers discussed how to break the cycle.



# 1

## *Itla's year 2024*



## 1.1 CEO's review

During the year under review, we spent a lot of time at Itla thinking about future horizons and directions. At the beginning of the year, we started a strategy process in which we, together with the personnel and Itla's Board of Trustees and Delegation, established an understanding of the key societal changes and trends that influence the future, as well as their impacts on children, young people and families with children. We clarified our vision of a good future, which we, as a foundation, are already committed to promoting in accordance with our purpose. Our vision for the Finland of 2040 as a child- and family-friendly welfare society serves not only as a guiding star for us, but also as a broader catalyst for discussion on what kind of future and welfare society Finland wishes to build.

In our strategic work, we articulated what kind of change we want to work towards at Itla, and how we, as a foundation, can execute our unique mission in Finnish society — and achieve social impact. Cooperation and partnerships are at the core of our activities. There is a need for common goals not only within Itla but also between organisations and in society as a whole. We believe in the power of networked cooperation, and we want to continue to build even stronger interaction between research, decision-making and practice. Itla focuses on the junctures in society where there are no other operators or which other operators are not able to address. Information is an essential building block of change, and it must support the interaction between research, practice and decision-making more constructively and effectively than before. At Itla, we focus on ensuring that the child-oriented information used in decision-making is of high quality and consists of multiple sources, including research, foresight knowledge, assessments and experience-based data, for example.

The starting point of our work is to provide effective support for the wellbeing of children, young people and families living in Finland. We recognise that, without effective and timely action, the long-term goals related to the wellbeing of children, young people and families cannot be achieved. This calls for systemic and complex changes in structures and operating models, as well as evidence-based interventions. There is also a need for the development of new innovations, driven by the courage to experiment and a desire for collective learning on new ways of doing things.

We have thought about the future not only as part of Itla's strategic work, but also our vision work, which started in the latter part of the year and is aimed at supporting the reform of services for families with children. We have worked on this in collaboration with a large group of experts. The purpose of a vision is to establish a shared understanding of the good things we want to hold on to in the future, as well as what kind of change we want to achieve. Our goal is that our work will continue to result in multi-stakeholder cooperation, shared understanding and collaboratively developed solutions that support the wellbeing of children, young people and families now and in the future.



**Katri Vataja**  
*Chief Executive Officer of Itla*

## 1.2 Purpose and impact of activities

Iitla promotes and supports the wellbeing, equality and position of children and families with children living in Finland, and contributes to building a good future for them. Iitla can also promote and support parenting and children's growth and education.

Iitla's strategy, which was approved by the Board of Trustees in October 2024, describes how we carry out our mission, what kind of long-term impact we want to achieve with our activities and how we act to promote the changes we wish to see. The strategy sets a goal and guides our decision-making and choices.

Our vision for the Finland of 2040 is a child- and family-friendly welfare society where children, young people and families of all kinds dare to dream and trust in a good future. Thriving children, young people and families lay the foundation for a successful democratic society and sustainable economy.

Iitla's three impact goals outline the change that we promote through our operations:

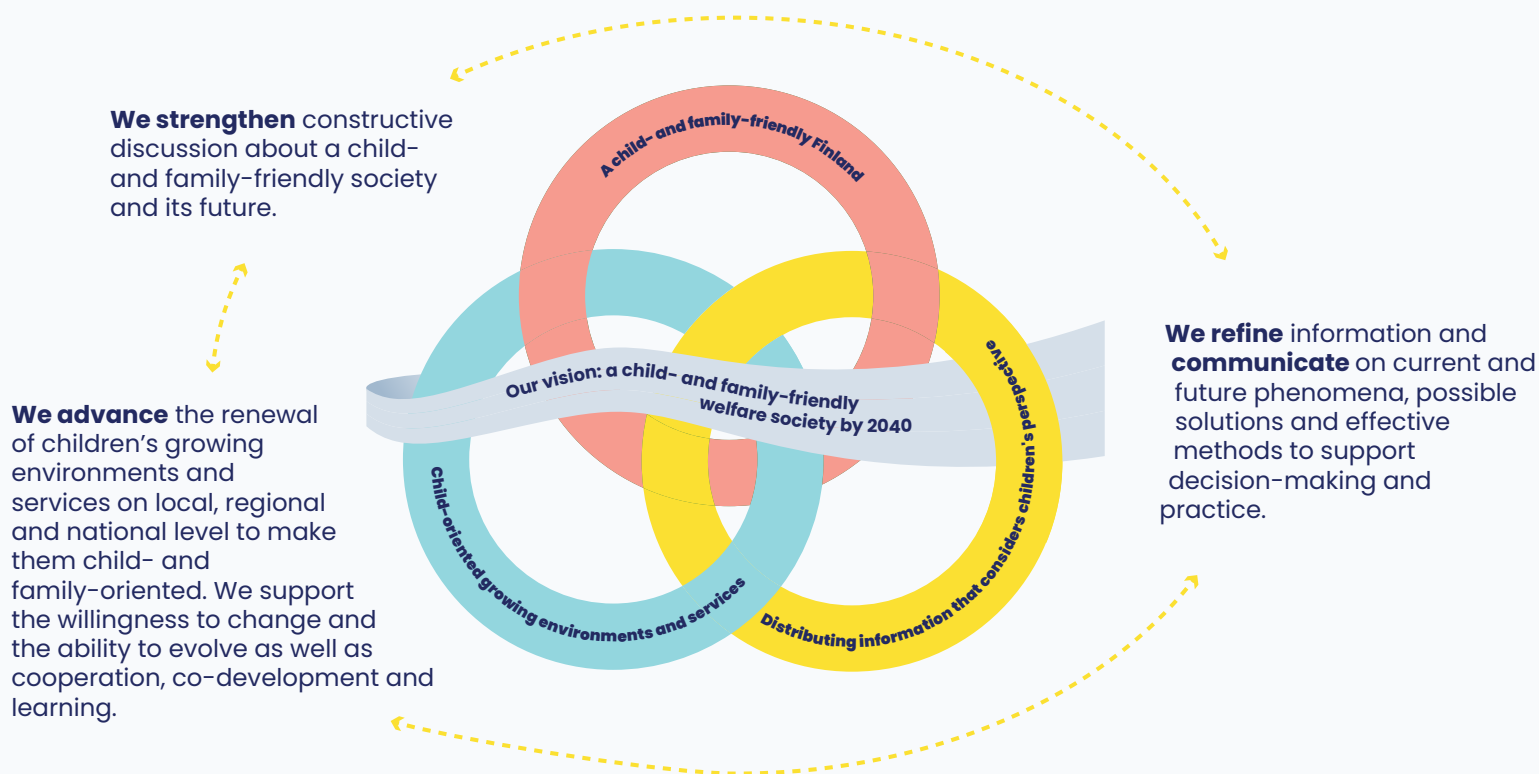
- **A child- and family-friendly Finland:** Children, young people and parents actively contribute to the future. Respect for children, young people, families and future generations is reflected in attitudes, public discourse, decision-making and concrete actions.
- **Distributing information that considers children's perspective**  
High-quality and diverse information that accounts for children's perspective increases understanding in decision-making and promotes the wellbeing of children and young people in a changing world.
- **Child-oriented growing environments and services:** Child-oriented growing environments and services support the resilience of children, young people and families through cooperation, impacts and renewal.

### How we achieve social impact

Achieving our impact goals requires comprehensive and systemic changes, which we promote through our own activities, but which also call for wide-ranging cooperation and partnerships. We believe that, as a foundation, we can bring about the desired changes by **strengthening** constructive discussion on a child- and family-friendly society and its future, and by **refining and disseminating information** on current and future phenomena, related solutions and effective methods to support decision-making and practical development.

We promote the use of high-quality child-oriented information that consists of multiple sources in decision-making. These sources include research, foresight knowledge, assessments and experience-based data. We operate as part of ecosystems where we develop impactful ways of compiling and using information. We also **advance** the renewal of local, regional and national growing environments and services to make them child- and family-oriented. We work with actors who affect the wellbeing of children, young people and families to support the actors' willingness to change and their ability to evolve as well as their cooperation, co-development and learning. Our work focuses on proactive and early-stage support for wellbeing.

In 2024, our activities were focused on promoting effective mental health support in our Early Intervention activities and our project for national implementation competence to support the growth of children and young people



**Figure 1.** How our work leads to change.

(KI). In our collective impact work, we promoted the reform of services for families with children and supported good daily life and resilience. We strengthened people-oriented wellbeing leadership, in which decision-making and service operations are renewed collectively and on a needs-driven basis.

In the final year of the Equal Start for Everyone – solutions to family and child poverty programme, our activities included a study on intergenerational poverty and actions to reduce family and child poverty. Researchers at the London School of Economics examined the mechanisms and models of intergenerational poverty. According to the researchers, breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty requires a service structure that brings together healthcare, schools and employment services, for example. Isolated actions in a single sector are not sufficient — instead, a multi-disciplinary approach and close cooperation between services and decision-makers are crucial.

Itla has programme directorship in the YOUNG programme funded by the Strategic Research Council and the PANDEMICS programme, which ended in 2024. Itla also has an implementing role in two research projects under the YOUNG programme. The programmes of the Strategic Research Council seek solutions to societal challenges. Cooperation between the producers and users of scientific knowledge is an important aspect of the programmes and a core element of all of Itla's activities.

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**In the final year of the Equal Start for Everyone – solutions to family and child poverty programme, our activities included a study on intergenerational poverty and actions to reduce family and child poverty.**

## 1.3 Kasvun tuki (Early Interventions)

Early Interventions offers competence in assessing the effectiveness of psychosocial methods to promote mental health, as well as their systematic implementation. In 2024, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of Early Interventions. The year culminated in a special anniversary seminar that brought together national and international partners.

In Early Intervention evaluation work, two new methodology evaluations were published in the form of systematic reviews. The assessed methods were the No Kids in the Middle group method and the International Child Development Programme (ICDP). In addition, 16 methodology evaluations were initiated.

The methodology evaluations were published in the Early Interventions method bank and the Kasvun tuki journal, two issues of which were published on the Journal.fi online platform for scientific journals. There were a total of 25 articles in the two issues published during the year. In addition to methodology evaluations, the issues featured eight peer-reviewed research articles and eight commentary articles. Two lectio praecursoria articles were also published.

Both of the issues published during the year celebrated the 10-year history of Early Interventions and featured a history of Early Interventions that was divided into two parts. The first issue of the year was also printed in a slightly condensed format for distribution at the special anniversary seminar and other events.

One round of evaluator training was organised, with 26 new evaluators trained. The Early Interventions evaluator pool now comprises 53 evaluators. The effectiveness evaluation and implementation of psychosocial methods was also taught to future professionals in social and health services in the University of Helsinki's Master's Programme in Social and Health Research and Management.

In the project for national implementation competence to support the growth of children and young people (Early Interventions KI, 2023–2025), we promoted the implementation of effective psychosocial interventions.

Approximately 300 people signed up for **Successful implementation of evidence-based methods**, an online course created in a sub-project aimed at *strengthening implementation competence in wellbeing services counties*. The course has received good feedback on its content and scope. The five-webinar series entitled *Implementing effective methods – how to lead the process successfully* continued with over 600 registered participants during the year. The practical nature of the content has been highlighted in the positive feedback we have received on the webinar series. Regular correspondence and the co-development of implementation support materials with stakeholders and, in particular, professionals engaged in implementation in the wellbeing services counties, has played an important role in the development efforts. One of the key co-development processes concerns the modelling of implementation teams, and the process involves participants from several different wellbeing services counties. During the year, content was actively prepared for the implementation support website that will be launched in spring 2025.

In a systematic literature review, evidence-based information is collected in a systematic and transparent manner. Conclusions are drawn from the collected information. Systematic literature reviews respond to precisely defined research questions, such as whether a specific intervention can reduce specific symptoms or disorders compared to normal support measures.





In 2024, the sub-project on **adaptation** piloted Kuusio, a methodology evaluation tool that was developed in the project. Kuusio can be used to produce information on the suitability of interventions to a particular environment, which serves as a foundation for adaptation and supports wellbeing services counties in the selection of interventions. The Kuusio tool proved to be effective, and the pilot project demonstrated not only the attributes of the interventions used but also the challenges related to their selection and implementation. In addition, national adaptation training and an in-depth workshop have been organised, and adaptation-related presentations have been delivered to professionals in the areas of education, social services and healthcare.

The sub-project focused on **the monitoring of methods** documented information needs by user group and established three alternative monitoring systems that took into account the Finnish infrastructure and legislation. After comments were sought from wellbeing services counties, university clinics and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, one of the alternatives was selected: a national situational picture of mental health and substance abuse services. The development of a national situational picture of mental health and substance abuse services began in late 2024 in cooperation between Itla and the information management function of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare.

In the sub-project aimed at **strengthening mental health identification and support in education services**, a three-webinar series entitled *Hope, support and tools for encounters* was implemented in cooperation with the Regional State Administrative Agency for Southern Finland and the Regional State Administrative Agency for Lapland. Between 200 and 300 participants signed up for each of the webinars. The second part of the online course on behavioural support was published in May 2024, followed by the third part in December. A total of approximately 1,500 professionals have signed up for the online course. The feedback on both the webinar and the online course has been excellent. The positive feedback has highlighted the expert, clear and practical content that corresponds to current needs.

The first two training groups of *Group management and supporting positive behaviour in lower secondary school* pilot training aimed at subject teachers in lower secondary school, developed in cooperation with the municipalities of

Kokkola and Veteli, were piloted in the autumn. The training met all expectations and achieved the goals set for it to an excellent degree. The development of the flexibly enhanced mental health support model continued, and the writing of the related guide progressed according to plan. A multidisciplinary development group participated in the development effort, including representatives from the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, MIELI Mental Health Finland, education services, student welfare services and healthcare.

We influenced the content of the therapy guarantee for children and young people by issuing a statement, and we were invited to be heard by the parliamentary Social Affairs and Health Committee. In cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, we organised a roundtable discussion on the selection of psychosocial interventions for children and young people. The international exchange of information related to the core activities of Early Interventions continued in two Nordic networks: The First 1000 Days in the Nordic Countries (2023–2027) and NordicDataPrev, the annual meeting of which was hosted by Itla. In addition, we started developing the assessment of psychosocial indicators of children and young people in cooperation with the Norway-based journal PsykTestBarn.

Together with the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, Itla represented Finland in the First 1000 Days network. During the year, the network issued a statement on the Nordic Cooperation Programme for Health and Social Affairs 2025–2030. A project to promote the systematic implementation of evidence-based interventions was prepared under Itla's leadership. The project "Improving Child Health in the First 1000 Days: The implementation of interventions and screening tools used in services during the first 1000 days in children's lives" received first-phase funding for 2025 from the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Itla joined the Finnish Parliament's group on safe pregnancy and infancy. The group aims to make society more baby-friendly by promoting family-friendly policies and increasing decision-makers' awareness of the significance of pregnancy and infancy as life stages and their impacts on later life.

*Itla's Early Interventions is a recognised expert with a long-term approach to the effectiveness assessment and implementation of psychosocial methods that support children, young people and families. The project for national implementation competence to support the growth of children and young people (Early Interventions KI) produces new tools to promote equality among children and young people and provides support for the implementation of effective psychosocial methods throughout the service system. Expertise in the evaluation and implementation of methods separates Itla from other operators in the field of children and families and is aligned with the Government Programme entries that emphasise effectiveness.*

# 26

trained evaluators

# 36

students in the Master's Programme in Social and Health Research and Management

# 25

articles in the Kasvun tuki journal

# 24

presentations related to adaptation

# 147

participants in adaptation training

# 300

students enrolled in an online course on implementation

# 600

participants in a webinar on implementation

# 1,500

participants in an online course on identifying and supporting mental health in education

## 1.4 Collective impact

Itila supports the comprehensive renewal of the service system for children, young people and families through collective impact work. Collective impact work means that organisations, municipalities, parishes and wellbeing services counties work together closely to develop local solutions based on evidence-based information to strengthen the wellbeing of children, young people and families.

Itila and the University of Oulu support regions carrying out collective impact work and promote the dissemination of the approach throughout Finland. Itila engages in collective impact work with the regional learning network in various parts of Finland.

The regional learning network's collective impact work continued in 2024 in cooperation with the five participating wellbeing services counties: North Karelia (SiunSote), Central Ostrobothnia (Soite), Pirkanmaa (Pirha), North Ostrobothnia (Pohde) and Kanta-Häme (Oma Häme). The participating wellbeing services counties are committed to using collective impact methods in the renewal of the service system for families with children. In 2024, cooperation was prepared with four wellbeing services counties (Central Finland, Southwest Finland, Western Uusimaa and Kymenlaakso). Community impact work in these wellbeing services counties will begin in 2025.

In 2024, we continued to strengthen the interfaces between collective impact work and the family centre operating model. In particular, we have promoted the formation and establishment of 1) local working groups, 2) sub-regional coordination groups and 3) regional steering group structures between the wellbeing services county, municipalities and third-sector operators as part of the family centre operating model and knowledge-based management.

Shared structures are essential for the realisation of the intersectoral cooperation required for well-functioning family centres and the development and management of operations and practical work in accordance with the basic principles of collective impact.

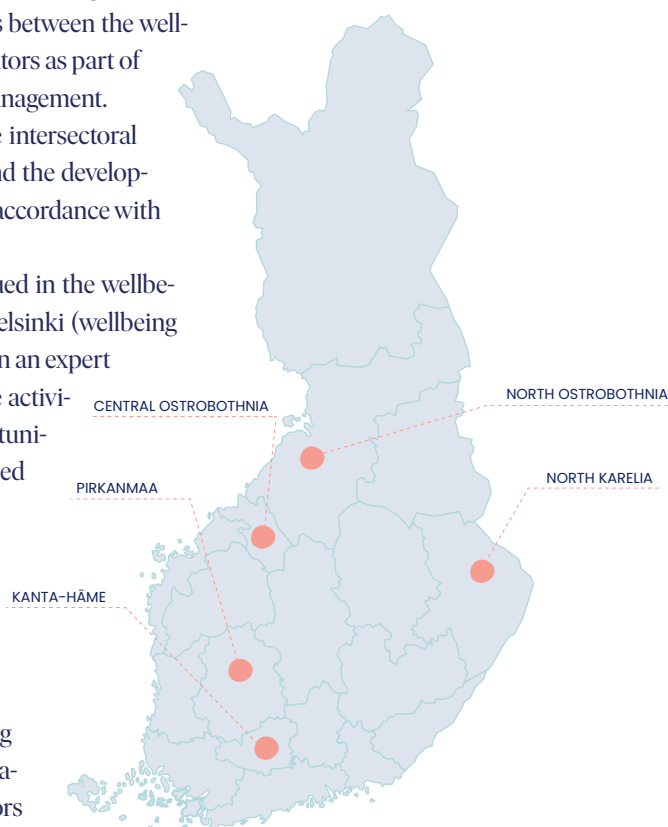
Work based on phenomenon-specific initiatives continued in the wellbeing services county of Vantaa-Kerava (youth crime) and Helsinki (wellbeing among secondary school students). Also in 2024, Itila acted in an expert role in a project that develops the Finnish model for leisure activities, in which five major cities developed local leisure opportunities on the basis of collective impact. They also co-developed cooperation between cities.

The objectives of the regional learning network and network of researchers are systemic, internally driven long-term change and a paradigm shift towards research that utilises a new translational approach to work.

In 2024, the cooperation areas carried out research on the impact of the family's stress factors on wellbeing among children and young people. The topic was addressed in relation to placement outside the home, mental health risk factors and interventions that promote children's wellbeing. Also examined were news related to parenthood and the content they

At the core of the work is the development of the activities of different sectors so that they support families with children early, on a cooperative basis and for a sufficiently long time.

The cornerstones of collective impact work are common practices agreed on by professionals, a shared management group that supports the work, and a shared understanding of phenomena that need to be addressed.





provide for the discussion on parenthood. Several studies were also initiated, particularly on the health of children placed outside their homes.

In autumn 2024, we launched a new collective impact website and learning path. The website aims to respond to the information- and communication-related needs of developers in the cooperation areas and everyone involved or interested in collective impact work, and to support learning and development related to collective impact work in local development efforts. The "News about collective impact work" newsletter presented operators engaged in development efforts in the cooperation areas and highlighted good practices and accomplishments in collective impact work.

An evaluation study on the collective impact model began in late 2024. Its scope covers all of the areas participating in collective impact work. The purpose of the evaluation study is to increase understanding of the operating principles of the collective impact model in achieving systemic change and to find out how the operations have started in the participating areas and what kinds of results have been achieved.

In 2024, an operating model for psychosocial support that takes the entire family's life situation into consideration was modelled on the basis of a literature review and background interviews as part of the **Modelling and implementation of psychosocial support (illness in the family) project**. The operating model includes an assessment of the family's need for support and the tailoring of support with the help of a multidisciplinary networked approach. The piloting of the operating model has begun in two wellbeing services counties (Pirha and Pohde, coastal area), utilising the collective impact framework in training and implementation support, for example. A search for indicators that measure a family's functional capacity and the success of networked efforts has begun to facilitate the assessment of the operating model's effectiveness.

The outlines of the expansion of collective impact work over the next five years were also planned in 2024. In the future, the aim is to be able to offer all interested wellbeing services counties and municipalities the opportunity to join collective impact work and the regional learning network. In December 2024, a six-part workshop series was launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health with the aim of creating a 2030 vision for services for children, young people and families, and to outline the steps necessary for realising that vision.

### **The primary care service path for children and young people with neuropsychiatric symptoms in the wellbeing services county of Central Ostrobothnia (Soite)**

**The Research and Innovation Fund for Collective Impact Work** funded an employee resource (1 person-year) to support the implementation of a service and treatment path for children with neuropsychiatric symptoms in the wellbeing services county of Central Ostrobothnia in 2024. The development of the service path began in 2022 in the local collective impact management team. The service path has been developed through extensive multidisciplinary cooperation with family centre services and municipal professionals. A peer support group consisting of parents of children with neuropsychiatric symptoms was consulted during the development process, and lessons learned from the development of similar models in other wellbeing services counties were collected.

In 2024, the aim of the development work was to incorporate the service path in electronic form into the website of the wellbeing services county of Central Ostrobothnia and to support the extensive implementation of the service path.



A service path that is enhanced according to needs and takes into account the life situation of the child and the family, and different developmental environments (early childhood education, school), was already seen in 2024 as having clarified the access to appropriate assistance for children with neuropsychiatric symptoms and their families, and to have reduced, for example, unnecessary diagnostic evaluations (such as ADHD) in situations where the child's or young person's neurodevelopmental symptoms were alleviated by everyday support measures.

### **Näkymä tool for creating a situational picture**

The digital Näkymä situational picture tool supports collective impact work and Iita's cooperation areas in foresight and knowledge-based management activities concerning the service needs of families with children. The development and maintenance of Näkymä continues in cooperation with Hahmota Oy and VXT Research Oy.

The use of Näkymä continued in five family centre areas in Tampere. In spring 2024, plans were made for the implementation of Näkymä in autumn 2024 in two of the City of Oulu's wellbeing centre areas. In order to support implementation and enhance the use of Näkymä, communication materials were produced during the autumn and a communication campaign was carried out to explain the purpose, goal and benefits of Näkymä, as well as user experiences.

A design article on the development of the Näkymä tool was published in June in the International Journal of Innovation and Technology Management. In spring 2024, Näkymä was approved as part of the OECD's Observatory of Public Sector Innovation case study library.

4

studies published in the network of researchers

6

issues of the "News about collective impact work" newsletter

- *Preparations for joining collective impact work were made with four wellbeing services counties: Central Finland, Southwest Finland, Western Uusimaa and Kymenlaakso.*
- *The collective impact website and learning path were launched in October.*
- *Six issues of the "News about collective impact work" newsletter were published*
- *Four studies were published in the network of researchers, and research results were integrated into development efforts.*



## 1.5 Leadership training

The wellbeing of children, young people and families is managed in Finland through various services and measures in the public, private and third sectors. However, the prevailing approach to leadership in the service context is substance-driven and tied to organisational structures, where the provision and receiving of assistance tends to become segregated and fragmented.

Itla has consistently underscored that there is need for a significant competence leap in leadership thinking and competence in the organisations and networks responsible for the wellbeing of children, young people and families. Supporting wellbeing in a complex world is a demanding and multifaceted task, and success in that task requires leadership skills that are based on a people-oriented and needs-driven approach and cross-sectoral co-creation.

Through our long-term Childhood Builders leadership training, we have strengthened the capabilities of the central government, wellbeing services counties, municipalities, non-governmental organisations and companies with regard to people-oriented and meta-skilled wellbeing leadership.

The third course of Childhood Builders graduated in 2024, consisting of heads of divisions and service directors from wellbeing services counties, as well as heads of education and directors of health and welfare from municipalities. This meant that the participants specifically represented the parties that, following the administrative reforms in Finland, are responsible for developing local and regional sets of services for children, young people and families. The participants, who face major leadership challenges in their work, felt that the training was particularly valuable because it supported the development and renewal of their leadership. After graduation, the directors in charge of services for children, young people and families in the wellbeing services counties decided to continue national cooperation within a leadership and advocacy network of their own.

Also under way in 2024 was Itla's first Childhood Builders leadership potential course, Childhood Builders 4, which focuses on training future leaders. The aim of the training is to build strong leadership skills that stand the test of time and help the participants to operate in changing societal conditions while maintaining a child-oriented and visionary approach.

Both of the leadership training programmes that were under way had Scotland as an international cooperation partner, as Scotland provides inspiring examples of successful policy coherence and jointly accomplished results through collaboration with different operators in organising support for the wellbeing of children, young people and families.

In addition to long-term leadership training, we continued the Childhood Builders alumni network in 2024 and organised further education for the 70 alumni who have completed the training and, furthermore, we offered expertise in wellbeing leadership in the form of lectures and workshops at various partner events.

With our leadership training, we facilitate the cooperative and needs-driven renewal of decision-making and services. Also, good leadership builds opportunities for professionals to succeed in their work, societal trust, a child-friendly society and possibilities of participation for children, young people and families.

# 50

leadership training  
alumni

# 50

in training

- The Childhood Builders leadership training course 3, which was targeted at supporting the national wellbeing services county reform, graduated.
- The Childhood Builders training course for future leadership potential began.
- Itla established its position as a developer and training provider in having a people-oriented and needs-driven approach to leadership.

## 1.6 Equal Start for Everyone – solutions to family and child poverty

Between 2021 and 2024, the Equal Start for Everyone programme has explored the state of family and child poverty in Finland, identified effective methods to reduce it, and advanced research and advocacy related to the topic. The topics studied under the programme in 2024 included the following:

- young adults' experiences of poverty in childhood, the poverty-reducing impact of social security on families
- using the SISU microsimulation model to determine how much lower the number of poor children would be if the child benefit had remained index-linked
- the significance of the school attended by a child with a foreign background with regard to their societal status as a young adult
- Robbery and violent crime committed by children and young people, examined through statistics and surveys
- factors related to family and child poverty at the municipal level and the effect of the indicator used on the localisation of family and child poverty
- the relationship between financial difficulties among families children and the costs of social services and healthcare for children
- the relationship between challenging life events as circumstances preceding a person's status as a recipient of social assistance

The "Family and child poverty as data" website has been maintained and updated, and work has begun on a book on family and child poverty in Finland, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand.

Experts from the programme have been invited to deliver remarks in Parliament at a number of events related to child poverty or family and child poverty, such as the Parliament's Poverty Day event.

The themes of the Equal Start for Everyone programme were also reflected in Itla's media hits: there was news coverage related to family and child poverty and Itla almost each month in various online publications, a total of 59 times, in 2024.

Political measures should emphasise adequate social security for families with children and improve employment policy. Reducing financial insecurity in families is particularly important, as it reduces stress in families and ensures positive interaction within the family and the good development of the child.

### International review of intergenerational poverty

An international review of intergenerational poverty commissioned from the London School of Economics was published in October, and an international seminar was organised in connection with its publication.

The meta-review by Irene Bucelli and Abigail McKnight from the London School of Economics drew on evidence from high-income OECD countries. According to the results of the study, childhood experiences of low family incomes increase the risk of poverty in adulthood. The financial constraints of families affect their opportunities to invest in their children's wellbeing, such as good living conditions, education and healthcare. The cycle is exacerbated by low educational attainment among parents and a weak job market.

Poverty also increases the stress experienced by family members, which can affect the quality of parenting and the social and emotional development of children. Consequently, the stress caused by poverty also increases children's risk of poverty in adulthood. Economic and social problems are often interlinked, but positive interaction can mitigate the negative effects of poverty. Parents' psychological wellbeing and minimal stress load significantly improve the future opportunities of their children and reduce the risk of intergenerational poverty.

### Equal Start for Everyone Oulu pilot project and study

In the Equal Start for Everyone Oulu pilot project, we worked together with the City of Oulu to seek new solutions to family and child poverty. The pilot proj-

ect sought to identify the impact of the family's financial problems on children and young people at an early stage. The focus was on the activation of leisure activities for children and young people in a manner that supports their ability to cope with their circumstances. Where necessary, other support needed by the family was organised with the help of the City of Oulu's multidisciplinary networked efforts based on collective impact.

The pilot project involved a number of partners through which the participating families were identified in basic services. Seven families were referred to the activities in 2023 and 31 families in 2024. The families were referred to the activities by the Equal Start for Everyone Oulu pilot project's partners, such as integration and employment services. Close cooperation between Equal Start for Everyone Oulu, the Auta Lasta child welfare organisation's Järjestövarikko project and the "Making Dreams Come True" activities of SOS Children's Village supported the success of the pilot project. The participating families' overall situation was addressed not only by supporting leisure activities for children and young people but also through networked efforts based on collective impact.

An evaluation study was carried out on the pilot project. According to the results, the pilot project was perceived in the services as a new and concrete way of supporting meaningful leisure activities for children in low-income families.

Support for leisure activities enabled the children to participate in hobbies in challenging life situations and alleviated the overall burden on the families. The results indicate that there is a continued need for multi-stakeholder cooperation to reduce the negative impacts of family and child poverty. The study is under review by the journal Children and Youth Services Review.

During the pilot project, consideration of the perspective of children and young people in services for adults was also promoted, and operators providing financial support, hobby equipment or free-of-charge opportunities were brought together. Of the partners of Equal Start for Everyone Oulu, the Oulu Deaconess Institute Foundation, oral healthcare services for children and young people, integration services and employment services began to examine their own work and network-based work from the perspective of the collective impact framework during the pilot project. This work will continue in Oulu in cooperation with the operators involved after the end of the pilot project.

### Valoisat group

The young experience leaders of the Valoisat group, together with researchers from Itla, completed their co-research in spring 2024. The co-research report, entitled "Poverty is a lack of opportunities", was published in the Little Parliament annex of the Finnish

Parliament in May. The event featured a discussion between Members of Parliament representing various political parties on what poverty feels like, and how coping with poverty can be supported by political decisions.

In February, the Valoisat group met with Members of Parliament representing the Green Parliamentary Group. In the autumn, the Valoisat group familiarised itself with the Cycle of Poverty: Intergenerational poverty in Finland and Europe publication and subsequently planned and presented the panel questions at an event that featured both a national and international panel discussion. Young peo-

Going forward, the City of Oulu's wellbeing promotion services will coordinate a network of operators that grant financial support. Considering the impacts of the financial circumstances on the daily life of children and young people will continue in Oulu as part of collective impact work.

The co-research examined young adults' experiences of childhood poverty and coping with poverty. Poverty was manifested in a wide range of experiences, but the common thread was that poverty was experienced as a lack of opportunities in some way, involving not only material scarcity but also social and emotional stress.



ple from the Valoisat group also participated in the IMAGINE research project's "Imagine if" dialogue event at the University of Helsinki in October.

The Valoisat group has operated from 2022 to 2024. A total of 20 young people have participated in the group. They felt that their participation in the group's work was meaningful, as it allowed them to voice their experiences and perspectives and thereby influence things. Their competence in various methods of advocacy work has increased, as has their understanding of family and child poverty as a complex phenomenon.

### Lapsoset project

The Lapsoset project, which began in 2023, focused on low-income families with children and social security benefits. In the project, researchers from the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) and Itla established a picture of the livelihoods of low-income families with children in Finland. In the spring, the project organised an expert workshop to think about, and develop solutions for, reducing low-income circumstances among families with children. The project's completion was marked in November by a final seminar and the publication of a report.

The Lapsoset project examined low-income status among families with children, social security and changes thereto, the effects of childcare allowances, the housing arrangements of separated families and the effectiveness of agreements on child support. The data included research literature, register materials and expert interviews.

One of the key results was that nearly half of all families with a single guardian and just under 6% of families with two guardians received general housing allowance in 2022. In 2023, 46,600 families with children received basic social assistance (income support), with 8% of Finland's population in the 0–17 age group living in these families. Most of these families received basic social assistance on a short-term basis. The changes to social security in 2024 are estimated to increase the number of low-income families with children. Children living with both parents after the parents' separation, which has become increasingly common, increases the total costs of a child. If a child is considered to also be a member of the non-resident parent's household, the equivalent disposable incomes of the non-resident parents decrease and the rate of low income among the households in question increases. Child support, or child maintenance allowance that is paid to complement child support or instead of child support, has a key role in the livelihood of low-income families when a child's parents have separated. Early support and the prevention of disputes between parents would improve agreement on child support.

The Lapsoset project was funded by the Finnish Government's analysis and research appropriations (VN-TEAS).

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- *An international review of intergenerational poverty by researchers from the London School of Economics: Political measures should emphasise adequate social security for families with children and improve employment policy.*
  - *The Equal Start for Everyone Oulu pilot project was perceived as a concrete way of supporting meaningful leisure activities for children in low-income families. Support for leisure activities enabled the children to participate in hobbies in challenging life situations and alleviated the overall burden on the families.*
  - *"Poverty is a lack of opportunities", a co-research report produced in collaboration with young people from the Valoisat group, was published in the Little Parliament annex of the Finnish Parliament.*

# 1.7 Strategic research programme management and research projects

## Programme directorships of the Strategic Research Council's PANDEMIC and YOUNG programmes

The programmes of the Strategic Research Council seek multidisciplinary solutions to societal challenges. Cooperation between the producers and users of scientific knowledge is an important aspect of the programmes. Itla's objective of building bridges, bringing different operators together and synthesising information between decision-makers, research communities and professionals working in the field of children's and young people's wellbeing provides a natural background for strategic research at Itla. Itla provides the programme director with diverse networks of societal influence.

The PANDEMICS programme (2021–2024) focused on crises caused by pandemics and their widespread impacts in society. The YOUNG programme (2022–2028) seeks research-based solutions for securing equal opportunities for children and young people for a good life and safe growth and development. The programme director plans and manages the societal impact work of the programme.

In the PANDEMICS programme, impact activities were focused on drafting a publication compiling evidence-based solutions and recommendations from the projects implemented under the programme. In November 2024, the publication *Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic: Towards better crisis preparedness and crisis management* was published at the programme's final seminar "How the next health crisis will be managed in Finland".

In impact activities under the YOUNG programme, a Junc-tures dialogue event was implemented in spring 2024 with the young people's mental health support group of the Finnish Parliament. In September, the YOUNG programme participated in the "Hyvin sanottu" discussion festival in Lahti. In November, Itla organised a stakeholder event entitled *School matters*, with approximately 100 partners participating. Itla participated in the drafting of the *Osallistujien Suomi* national action plan for strengthening participation and inclusion and reducing loneliness by the YOUNG programme's Right to Belong project and the parliamentary working group on the reduction of loneliness and ostracism. The action plan was delivered to Prime Minister Petteri Orpo on 15 November 2024.

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**Itla provides the diverse networks of societal influence for the work of the programme director.**

## Improving Mental Wellbeing as a Means of Increasing the Participation of Young People (IMAGINE)

In the IMAGINE project, Itla implements a work package in which the objective of the first stage (2023–2025) is to identify factors influencing the implementation of interpersonal counselling (IPC-N) at different levels of the service system. The aim is for the research results to also benefit other methods in implementation planning. Interpersonal counselling is a structured method for treating depression symptoms in young people. Student healthcare professionals have been trained in the method since 2020 (approximately 1,700 graduates).

In the study, interviews have been conducted with key individuals involved in implementation at the national level, university hospitals, the wellbeing services counties and student healthcare. In addition, written documents have been collected on the implementation of interpersonal counselling in Finland.

According to the preliminary results of the implementation study, the parties involved mostly had a positive attitude towards interpersonal counselling for young people. Although the implementation was supported by national funding, the project-based nature of the funding has posed challenges to long-term development. The tight start-up schedule for the preparatory stage was challenging for operators in the wellbeing services counties. The implementation of the method (e.g. training and coordination structures) has been carried out in different ways in different places, which has slowed the sharing of best practices, cooperation and national monitoring.

### **Services to Belong**

The Services to Belong project implemented by Itla is one of five work packages of the research consortium Right to Belong: Tackling Loneliness and Ostracism during Childhood and Youth. The project studies and develops services for children and young people experiencing loneliness and ostracism.

The research project utilised previously collected extensive data consisting of the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare's Nuortennetti discussion material, observations of a child welfare unit, a questionnaire and interviews involving the child welfare unit, interviews with the education, culture and youth services departments of municipalities, interviews with wellbeing services counties and the national level, and a digital brainstorming session for lower secondary school students. In 2024, the focus was on writing scientific publications based on the collected data. An article on young people's views on solutions to loneliness was published in the *Kasvun tuki* journal, and an article on young people's experiences of loneliness based on online discussion material was published in the journal *Youth & Society* in January 2025. In addition, a research article on loneliness and ostracism among children and young people in the interfaces of municipal services received a publication decision from the *Hallinnon tutkimus* journal, and four other articles are under review.

The project has also researched the significance of friendships and service use in adolescence in relation to different outcomes in adulthood. Extensive longitudinal data from Northern Finland Birth Cohort 1986 (NFBC86) is utilised in the research. The research manuscript was worked on in 2024. The study will be submitted to an international peer-reviewed journal for review.

Societal influence is one of the objectives of the research project. The research and its preliminary results have been communicated by publishing four posts on Itla's blog in autumn 2024, for example. The research team participated in stakeholder cooperation and the presentation of the research results at a partnership seminar of the City of Helsinki's youth services, at the YOUNG programme's stakeholder event and the FERA Conference on Education pre-webinar "Loneliness and ostracism — the significance of research in tackling a societal challenge".

The IMAGINE project and the Services to Belong project are funded by the Strategic Research Council, and they are part of the YOUNG programme.

## 1.8 Communications and events

Isla's new strategy broadens the communications horizon from communications aimed at decision-makers and professionals to also include a stronger focus on building a child- and family-friendly society and facilitating constructive public discussion. Isla's communications strategy was updated to correspond to the strategic objectives. Isla's influence communications were directed towards supporting the achievement of Isla's impact goals. The aim is to use our expertise to help decision-makers make decisions that promote the wellbeing and good future of children, young people and families. Preparations for the 2025 county and municipal elections began in autumn 2024, and the election messages were published at the beginning of the year.

The Finnish Transparency Register was introduced at the beginning of 2024. During the first year of the use of the register, we reported 42 contacts with decision-makers in Parliament and government ministries. Advocacy efforts were focused on the reduction of family and child poverty, the promotion of mental health, the renewal of leadership skills that promote wellbeing, the implementation plan for the National Strategy for Children, the promotion of the use of psychosocial interventions that have been assessed to be effective, and addressing loneliness and social exclusion among children and young people.

We launched Isla's new website at the beginning of 2024. In the autumn, we added a collective impact section and learning path to the website. The renewal of the website continued with the planning of new content on Early Interventions and the project for national implementation competence to support the growth of children and young people. The new content will be published in 2025. After 49 episodes, Isla's Childhood Builders podcast went on a break in autumn 2024. We updated the concept during the autumn, and the podcast will return in 2025. We publish four newsletters: News about Isla, News about collective impact work, and News about Early Interventions, which was first published in spring 2024. We also publish a newsletter on the YOUNG programme.

Family and child poverty and the mental health of children and young people were prominent themes in the media, as was the case in 2023. The cuts to social security, in particular, were also reflected in Isla's media hits — approximately 53% of the news coverage related to Isla was focused on family and child poverty. In the latter part of the year, the Osallistujien Suomi initiative on participation and inclusion also received media attention. Isla was mentioned in 117 online media in 2024.

In social media, LinkedIn emerged as the most important channel. The number of followers increased by 1,267 and stood at 2,867 at the end of 2024. Sometrik listed the 1,000 most popular Finnish-language pages on LinkedIn in 2024: Isla ranked 137th. The list is based on the number of reactions and comments on posts. Isla's Instagram account was the second-fastest growing channel after LinkedIn. The number of Instagram followers exceeded 1,000.

### Events

Isla organised, or was involved in organising, a total of 30 online, hybrid or in-person events in 2024. In the summer, we organised a special anniversary seminar to celebrate 10 years of Early Interventions and, in the autumn, we organised an international seminar entitled "The Cycle of Poverty: Intergenerational Poverty in Finland and Europe". We also organised a series of morning coffee events for the regional learning network in cooperation with the areas participating in the network.

25

blog posts

5

guest writers

36

news articles

2

articles  
published on the website

6

podcast episodes

5

media releases

4

publications, including  
three reports and one Point  
– Research Summaries  
publication



Early Interventions and the project for national implementation competence to support the growth of children and young people organised a series of webinars on the implementation and management of effective interventions, as well as a series of webinars entitled "Hope, support and tools for encounters", which was focused on encounters in the school context. Approximately 1,500 people participated in the webinars.

## 1.9 Grants and donations

### Grants for scientific research

No grants were given out in 2024.

### Endowed professorships

Itla has contributed two endowed professorships: a professorship in intervention and implementation research to the University of Oulu and a professorship to Tampere University as part of the Family and Child Poverty programme.

- University of Oulu (decision 12/2019; started in spring 2020; three-year endowment and an option; part-time 50%). In October 2022, the Board of Trustees approved the exercise of the two-year extension option on the endowed professorship of practice with an 80% time allocation from 1 May 2023 to 30 April 2025. The professorship is held by Mika Niemelä.
- Tampere University (decision 9/2021, started in spring 2022; three-year endowment and an option, 100%). The professorship is held by Mia Tammelin.

### Other funding granted by Itla

- North Karelia wellbeing services county, EUR 30,000. Development of a feedback system for the network and integration management of the wellbeing services county of North Karelia's family centre activities, funding period 1 January–31 December 2025.





# 2

## *Administration and personnel*

Iitla comprises the following bodies: delegation, Board of Trustees, Asset Management Committee and CEO. The Foundation also includes the editorial board of the *Kasvun tuki* journal. The Foundation complies with good governance in its operations and is a member of the Association of Finnish Foundations. The total number of staff employed by the Foundation at the end of 2024 was 42. Iitla's delegation is tasked with monitoring, supporting and promoting Iitla's activities. The delegation's appointment, composition and term of office are laid down by law (1004/2017). Pursuant to the Foundations Act, the Board of Trustees of Iitla is responsible for the Foundation's administration and the appropriate organisation of activities. Furthermore, the Board is responsible for the appropriate monitoring of the Foundation's accounting and asset management. In accordance with the Foundation's by-laws, the Board of Trustees prepares matters for consideration by the delegation, apart from selecting the members of the Board. The Board of Trustees also decides on the Foundation's strategy, resource planning and policy outlines. The Asset Management Committee is tasked with supporting the Foundation in responsible investing. The Foundation's asset management must be systematic, secure, profitable, considered and sustained. The Asset Management Committee evaluates the profit development and risks of invested assets, the functionality of our investment strategy and the operations of external asset managers. The Committee provides the Board of Trustees with a report on investment activities at least twice a year and prepares changes to the investment strategy for the Board as necessary.



# 3

## *Funding of the Foundation's activities*

The Foundation primarily funds its operations with returns from its investment activities. Externally funded projects are also part of the Foundation's actual activities. In the Foundation's investment strategy, the long-term strategic goal for the Foundation's investment assets is an annual real rate of return of 4%. The time frame of the Foundation's investments is long and investments must be systematic and responsible. The investments must be efficiently distributed across different asset classes, geographical areas, sectors, asset managers and investment types. Intelligibility and transparency are important principles in implementing the Foundation's investments. The operating budget outturn in 2024 was EUR 2,914,021.03 in total. The deficit for the financial period was EUR -16 794,93 (a deficit of EUR -744,208.94 in 2023).



# 4

## *Outlook for 2025*





In 2025, we will make visible and strengthen activities by which we advance our vision of a child- and family-friendly welfare society, as well as our three impact goals. We will do this in an operating environment where geopolitical tensions, safety-related concerns and economic uncertainty are reflected in the daily life of children and young people and may erode confidence in the future. That is why it is of paramount importance to ensure that the rights and needs of children and young people remain at the heart of societal decision-making, even in challenging times. We also want to strengthen young people's future-oriented skills and the utilisation of their views and perspectives in our own activities. To this end, we will establish a group of young influencers at Itla.

The tightening of public finances raises concerns about the implementation and development of services for children, young people and families in the social services, healthcare and education services of wellbeing services counties and municipalities. Increasingly meagre financial resources require a change in operating practices and call for an innovative approach and new cooperation structures and practices, as well as the bold adoption of new approaches to leadership.

The county and municipal elections in the spring present a particular opportunity to influence the wellbeing and future of children, young people and families. We want to stimulate discussion about the core question for Finland's success: how do we ensure that our children and young people have a good level of well-being? Itla's election message is clear: *A happy childhood is an intrinsic value — and a vital investment in the future. Children, young people and families must be comprehensively supported by municipalities and wellbeing services counties.* We will continue societal discussion on the same theme at the SuomiAreena event in June.

Under our new strategy, we will increasingly emphasise the use of high-quality and diverse information from the child perspective in decision-making and development. The phenomena that concern children and young people can be complex in nature, which is why the significance of dialogue between science, research and practice — and future-oriented thinking — are emphasised in their early identification and the development of new solutions.

In its Global Risks Report 2025, the World Economic Forum highlighted misinformation and disinformation as the most significant short-term risk, which also presents challenges the reliability and expertise of information related to the wellbeing of children and young people. This is fuelled by social media, which increasingly divides people between different platforms. At Itla, we will strengthen the ways in which information is established and used to create positive impacts, and we will provide forums for constructive discussion.

The therapy guarantee for children and young people, which will enter into effect in 2025, creates a national need for the development and use of evidence-based information on the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions. We will respond to this need by providing expertise and tools for the evaluation, selection and implementation of effective interventions and the monitoring of their effectiveness.

We will promote child- and family-oriented growing environments and services by creating milestones and conditions for the national utilisation of collective impact work. The series of workshops that began in 2024 on services for families with children, and the renewal of those services, resulted in a shared view of a large group of experts regarding the positive growth of children and young people. This work will continue in 2025 to provide a concrete expression of what kinds of structures of renewal — such as leadership, research, training and funding — are required to realise that vision.

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**We want to stimulate discussion about the core question for Finland's success: how do we ensure that our children and young people have a good level of well-being?**

# Financial statements for the financial period 1 January 2024–31 December 2024

Itla Children's Foundation  
1573913-1

## INCOME STATEMENT

	1 Jan–31 Dec 2024	1 Jan–31 Dec 2023
<b>Operating activities</b>		
<b>Income</b>	<b>2,088,092.25</b>	<b>1,345,545.47</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Personnel expenses	-2,935,212.93	-2,142,855.98
Depreciation	-1,790.97	-2,387.97
Other expenses	-2,065,109.38	-1,824,080.71
	<b>-5,002,113.28</b>	<b>-3,969,324.66</b>
<b>Surplus/deficit</b>	<b>-2,914,021.03</b>	<b>-2,623,779.19</b>
<b>Investment and financing activities</b>		
Income from investment activities	3,236,397.26	3,389,047.47
Expenses of investment activities	-339,171.16	-1,509,477.22
	<b>2,897,226.10</b>	<b>1,879,570.25</b>
<b>Profit (loss) for the financial year</b>	<b>-16,794.93</b>	<b>-744,208.94</b>

## BALANCE SHEET

	31 Dec 2024	31 Dec 2023
<b>ASSETS</b>		
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Tangible assets		
Machinery and equipment	5,372.92	7,163.89
Investments		
Other shares and participations	51,038,088.48	50,785,135.57
Total non-current assets	51,043,461.40	50,792,299.46
CURRENT ASSETS		
Receivables		
Non-current receivables		
Other receivables	2,275.69	2,275.69
Current receivables		
Accounts receivable	74,900.71	297,056.44
Other receivables	1,360,808.59	4,904.33
Accrued income	268,434.00	239,664.21
Total current receivables	1,704,143.30	541,624.98
Total receivables	1,706,418.99	543,900.67
Cash and cash equivalents	2,060,315.55	3,825,661.42
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	3,766,734.54	4,369,562.09
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>54,810,195.94</b>	<b>55,161,861.55</b>
<b>EQUITY AND LIABILITIES</b>		
EQUITY		
Original own funds	50,456.38	50,456.38
Fund donated by the Finnish Government	49,999,949.00	49,999,949.00
Profit (loss) from previous financial periods	3,779,730.12	4,523,939.06
Profit/loss for the financial period	-16,794.93	-744,208.94
TOTAL EQUITY	53,813,340.57	53,830,135.50
LIABILITIES		
Short-term liabilities		
Advances received	4.99	527,504.21
Accounts payable	612,473.59	433,211.59
Other liabilities	70,974.43	83,768.68
Accruals and deferred income	313,402.36	287,241.57
Total liabilities	996,855.37	1,331,726.05
<b>TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES</b>	<b>54,810,195.94</b>	<b>55,161,861.55</b>

