

**Itla Children's
Foundation
Annual Report 2023**

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 2023–31 December 2023.



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1 January–31 December 2023

Foreword

Finland is perceived internationally as a child-friendly society and a model country for education. When you examine the position and wellbeing of children, it is clear that there is still much work to be done. Although supporting families with children has been a key part of Finnish society, it is important to identify current challenges and seek solutions to address them.

One of the most significant challenges is family and child poverty. Finland is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, but family and child poverty remains a real problem. Having insufficient income is a daily struggle for many families, and it has a direct impact on children's wellbeing and future opportunities. Reducing family and child poverty calls for diverse and long-term measures and cooperation between various parties in society. One of the most straightforward ways to reduce family and child poverty is to increase financial support for families, but providing high-quality early childhood education and care and education to all children plays a key role in breaking the cycle of poverty. The parents lacking access to sufficiently well-paid jobs is also a factor in the poverty of many families with children. Improving employment opportunities for parents, especially mothers and single parents, can help reduce family and child poverty. In addition to the aforementioned measures, housing policy and the effectiveness of social services also influence the situation. The measures mentioned above do not function independently of each other. Instead, they should be implemented comprehensively as part of a broader strategy of child and family policy.

Mental health problems among children and young people are another important concern. Children today encounter various sources of pressure and stress, and mental health problems are sadly quite common. It is important to focus more on mental health services and provide early support opportunities that help children learn to process their feelings and challenges in a healthy way. With the wellbeing services county reform still under way, there is plenty of work in this area and the concerns about young people are justified.

The rapid development of the digital world also presents new challenges with regard to protecting children online. Children are now exposed more than ever before to online threats such as bullying, abuse and inappropriate content. Society must be even more committed to ensuring children's digital safety and provide appropriate education for both parents and children themselves.

It is important to focus more on mental health services and provide early support opportunities that help children learn to process their feelings and challenges in a healthy way.

While the challenges are significant, it is also important to identify the opportunities and strengths that Finland has for improving the position of children. Our education system is still one of the best in the world, and by investing in early childhood education and care and education, we can ensure that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential. In addition, Finland has a strong tradition of child-friendly policy. By continuing to develop child-friendly policy, we can ensure that every child receives the support and protection they need.

In June 2023, the Ombudsman for Children, Elina Pekkarinen, published an official letter in which she raised genuine concerns about how the weakening of social security for families with children jeopardises the positive goals established in the Government Programme. The letter also emphasises the importance of a careful overall assessment of the effects of all of the reforms on children's rights. The observation that Finland has not been able to curb child poverty was also made in a UNICEF report published in December 2023. Like Pekkarinen in her letter, UNICEF's report underscored the significant role of social protection in preventing family and child poverty.

As the parliamentary term progresses, the new Delegation is prepared to continue to work together with Itla to improve the position of children. We recognise that development is a continuous process that requires broad commitment and action on multiple levels. Finland has the strengths and resources necessary to create an even better future for all children. As Itla produces and disseminates information on the wellbeing of children and young people to support decision-making, I hope that our shared understanding of the position of children and families will grow stronger.

Investments in children and young people are investments in the future, and we need to focus on the future. It is a value choice to give every child the opportunity to prosper.

Pia Hiltunen
Chairperson of the Delegation



Highlights of the year

Itla is a bridge-builder between research, practice and decision-making. We produce information on wellbeing and present proposals for solutions to improve the wellbeing of children, young people and families.

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

The number of personnel doubled.

In January, Marjo Kurki from Itla was appointed as the Programme Director of Children and young people – healthy, thriving and capable makers of the future (**YOUNG**) Strategic Research programme.

The project for national implementation competence to support the growth of children and young people (**Early Interventions KI**) began in March.

Itla's child benefit model attracted media interest in March and was covered by Yle, Helsingin Sanomat, Iltalehti and various regional newspapers.

The Kasvun tuki journal was moved to the Journal.fi online platform for scientific journals. The first issue was among the most frequently read journals on the Journal.fi platform in June 2023.

Itla's new Delegation was elected on 28 June.

The first **alumni meeting** for graduates of the first two classes of Childhood Builders Leadership Training was organised on 19 April.

The Equal Start for Everyone Oulu pilot project began.

To support systematic implementation, an online course titled "Successful implementation of evidence-based methods" was created.

Itla organised collective impact training three times per month through the year. Thousands of participants attended the lectures.

A revised edition of the implementation guide was published in 2023. Itla received orders for 750 copies of the print version of the guide during the year.

Three new wellbeing services counties joined the collective impact work: Pirkanmaa, Kanta-Häme and North Ostrobothnia.

The Näkymä tool was adopted in Tampere in all five family centre areas.

A social media campaign implemented with the Valoisat group challenged decision-makers to think about solutions to family and child poverty.

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

Katri Vataja took up the post of CEO in August.

A stakeholder survey was completed. Read more on page 29.

PANDEMICS and Itla organised a panel discussion at the SuomiAreena event on the topic **Bringing nature back to the city – How to build a living environment that promotes health and wellbeing for future generations?**

The first "News about collective impact work" newsletter was published in October.

The third course of Childhood Builders Leadership Training began in September. The course is aimed at people in managerial positions in the wellbeing services counties.

1

*Itla's year
2023*



1.1 CEO's review

When future generations look back on 2023, will their attention be drawn to the increased analyses of the polycrisis and the sharp rise in uncertainty? The year was characterised by changes in the security situation related to the continued war in Ukraine and the conflict in the Middle East. The daily life of people in Finland was marked by tighter finances caused by inflation, higher interest rates and the energy crisis. The year 2023 was also the hottest on record, which had visible consequences around the world. Years of musings about the opportunities presented by artificial intelligence took concrete form for the first time for many people as new applications made generative AI accessible to everyone.

In 2023, people in Finland witnessed two historic changes that marked the beginning of a new era. Finland joined NATO and the new wellbeing services counties started their operations. While these changes may seem separate, they both stem from the need to respond to the challenges created by megatrends and create wellbeing and security for people today and future generations. The journey of changes is only in its early stages, which is why there is still a need for long-term projections and discussions about the future. The success of the changes depends on society's ability to utilise new ways of thinking and taking action, as well as new structures of cooperation and leadership. Power and the resources of public finances are both being redistributed.

From an adult's perspective, a few years in the midst of a pandemic, war and recession can ultimately feel like a fleeting moment. However, for children and young people, that moment is a unique part of childhood and youth. Adults are responsible for ensuring that the conditions for children's wellbeing and the realisation of children's rights are in place in every circumstance. Uncertainty must not be allowed to turn into anxiety about the future among children and young people. This trend needs to be reversed – what if our children lose faith in a better tomorrow?

At Itla, we work to promote wellbeing and a good future for children and young people. Among other things, this means responding to the changing needs of children, young people and families in a timely manner and with appropriate support. Children's rights, inclusion, equality and non-discrimination are our guiding principles. The realisation of these values must be evaluated again and again, in each time and environment.

In 2023, people in Finland witnessed two historic changes that marked the beginning of a new era. Finland joined NATO and the new wellbeing services counties started their operations.

The year 2023 was also a period of various changes and new initiatives at Itla. The Foundation's operations were significantly expanded with the help of external funding. In June, we started Early Interventions KI, an extensive three-year project that promotes the implementation of evidence-based methods to support the mental health of children, young people and families. Funding was received from the Strategic Research Council for investigating the implementation of mental health interventions for young people in the IMAGINE project, tackling loneliness and ostracism in the Services to Belong project and social impact work through programme directorship in the YOUNG programme.

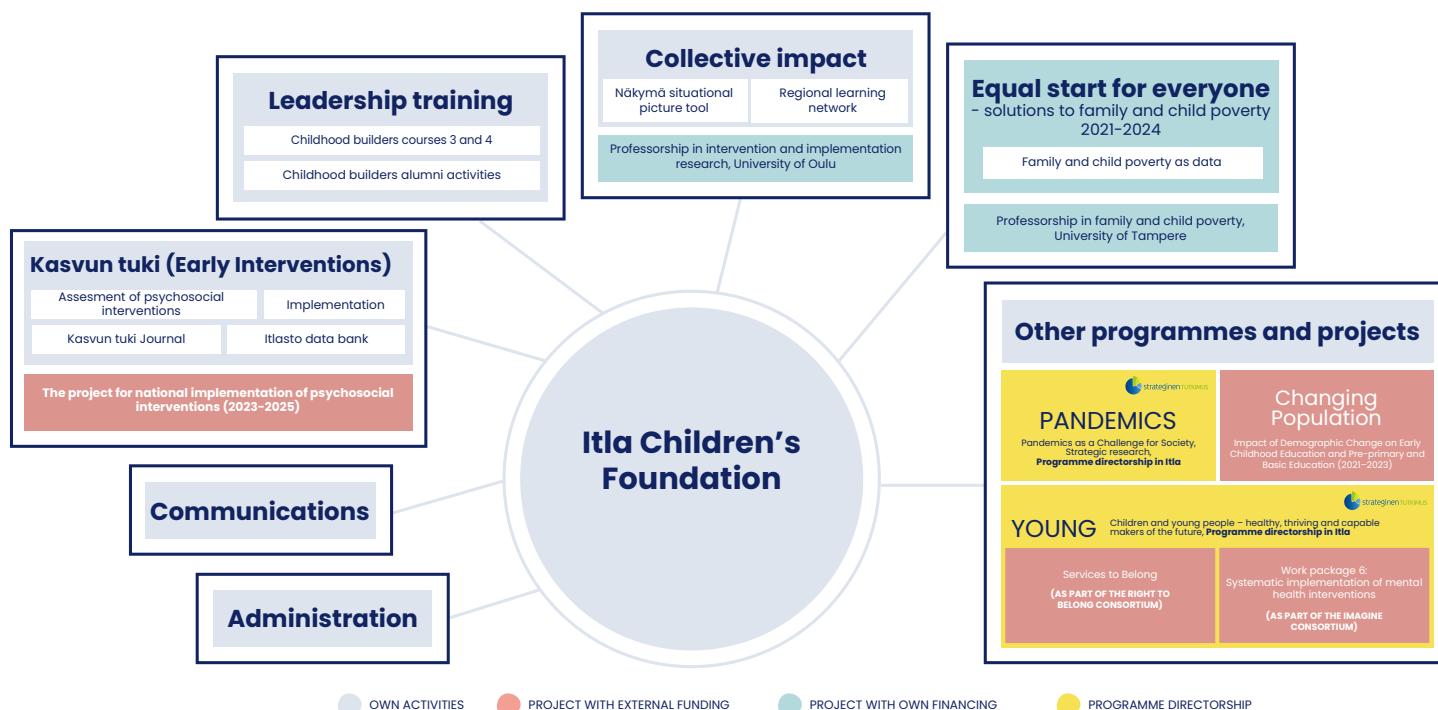
Research activities were completed during the year. The results of the Changing Population research project built increased understanding of the impacts of demographic changes on early childhood education and care and education, and how to strengthen children's participation. A lot of new research data was produced on family and child poverty. Easily accessible and applicable information was in high demand both in the media and among decision-makers. To promote the development of solutions, a pilot project was launched in Oulu to mitigate the impacts of financial difficulties on children and young people. Itla supported the wellbeing services county reform by inviting newly appointed service area directors from the wellbeing services counties, as well as directors of education and welfare from municipalities, to participate in Childhood Builders Leadership Training. The participants build local and regional service packages for children, young people and families in the new administrative structure. Our community impact work was expanded and we started cooperation with three new wellbeing services counties. We work together with local operators to support the renewal of services systematically and from the perspectives of good daily life and enhancing resilience.

The number of Itla's personnel doubled over the past year. I was one of the new members of the Itla organisation. Changes in the workplace community and the operating environment highlight new needs, opportunities and perspectives. This year, we will sharpen our vision of a desirable future towards which we want to work with a long-term approach and also inspire others to work towards it.

We want to further strengthen our impact in improving the wellbeing of children, young people and families, and we believe this is best accomplished through cooperation and partnerships.

Katri Vataja
Chief Executive Officer of Itla
March 2024





1.2 Purpose and impact of activities

Iita Children's Foundation promotes and supports the well-being, equality, position and good future of children, young people and families. Iita also promotes and supports parenting and the growth conditions and education of children. Iita is an independent bridge-builder between research, practice and decision-making.

Iita's strategic objectives are to produce information on the wellbeing of children and families in different life situations, to propose concrete solutions for improving the wellbeing of children, and to communicate information on wellbeing and related solutions.

Iita is positioned between research and practical development efforts. We contribute to the service system's ability to provide children, young people and families with the right assistance at the right time. Helping families requires cooperation between various operators. We promote the kind of cooperation that other operators do not necessarily have the opportunity to engage in.

The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters has described the Finnish science-policy ecosystem, in which Iita is categorised as a science broker. This is aligned with our view of how we, as a foundation, can promote research-based decision-making and societal interaction.

Iita holds the programme directorship in two programmes funded by the Strategic Research Council, and Iita is participating in two research projects. 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 Iita's activities.

Iita's tools for increasing wellbeing and enabling a good

future include research data, social innovations and the development of leadership skills. The three pillars of Iita's activities are collective impact, leadership training and Early Interventions. The impact of activities emerges from the use of research-based knowledge to offer solutions that support the wellbeing of children, young people and families. Research-based knowledge is not enough in itself. It needs to be paired with the tools and competence to implement the required changes at the practical level nationally, regionally and locally.

In our collective impact work, we engage in the systemic renewal of services through seamless cooperation with local operators, using good daily life and resilience as the starting points. Leadership, for its part, is a cross-cutting factor that enables child-centred change. Early Interventions work, the evaluation of psychosocial methods and supporting their implementation at the national and regional levels particularly address certain identified challenges, such as behavioural problems among children and mental health challenges among young people. The Equal Start for Everyone programme strengthens the scientific knowledge base on measures that can be used to reduce family and child poverty. Iita's other projects are linked to these functions and provide synergies.

The implementation of evidence-based methods that support the wellbeing of children, young people and families is an area that no other operator is developing as strongly at present in Finland. Iita has introduced collective impact thinking to Finland and, as background support organisation, supports its implementation at the regional level. Leadership training currently reaches precisely those individuals who are building regional service packages for children, young people and families in the newly established wellbeing services counties.

Stakeholder survey 2023

Itla's impact was evaluated in 2023 by means of a stakeholder survey. The results indicate that Itla is seen to be engaged in the right activities. Itla's strategic positioning and role in the field of children, young people and families is, as a rule, considered to be appropriate. Itla is primarily perceived as a producer of data and a unique promoter of systematic action. At the same time, Itla's role and position is challenged by the fact that, outside its key stakeholders, Itla is not necessarily known or recognised as an operator in the field of children's, young people's and families' wellbeing, or the non-core stakeholders may not be familiar with Itla's activities. Itla's work is perceived to be useful; without Itla, Finland would lack an entity that maintains networks and engages in systematic long-term development to promote the wellbeing of children, young people and families.

"Proactive thinking and systematic work on effective methods and effectiveness data are particularly important."

– Stakeholder survey respondent

A comprehensive, long-term approach to work is seen as a prerequisite for the impact of Itla's activities. This includes reliable and open communication and interaction that adheres to the ethical principles of science. Studying current topics and highlighting them in societal discussion also increases impact.

A number of critical factors for Itla's ability to be a meaningful and impactful operator in promoting the wellbeing of children and families were identified in the interviews. Itla's activities are influenced by, for example, the ability of public social and health services to utilise and adopt new operating practices and, more generally, the usability of information.

The interviewed stakeholders were of the opinion that the prerequisites for impact are currently met to a fairly good extent, particularly with regard to cooperation. In the social and health service sector, the impact could still be better, although Itla is perceived to be developing continuously as regards the utilisation of information.

The interviewed stakeholders were of the opinion that the prerequisites for impact are currently met to a fairly good extent, particularly with regard to cooperation.

"Itla is perceived primarily as a producer and disseminator of societal information related to the wellbeing and health of children and young people, and as an entity that brings this information to society."

– Stakeholder survey respondent

The stakeholder survey also highlighted the wish for the increased provision of more practical forms of activities.

Itla's activities are guided by children's rights and the principles of participation, equality and non-discrimination. An information-based approach and internationality are also key guidelines for Itla's activities. We promote the consideration of children's best interests in decision-making and the realisation of children's rights for every child. We want to continue to build a future in which the consideration of children's rights, child-centred activities and the genuine participation of children are the mainstream in decision-making and service activities.



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.

The evaluation editorial team of Early Interventions published two new methodology evaluations in the form of systematic reviews. The evaluated methods were ProKoulu and Nuorten Kompassi. The editorial team also piloted a new evaluation system and organised two rounds of evaluator training with 19 new graduates. 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.

The Kasvun tuki journal was moved to the Journal.fi online platform for scientific journals. Two issues of the journal were published with a total of 24 articles. The first issue was among the most frequently read journals on the Journal.fi platform in June 2023.

A three-year project for national implementation competence to support the growth of children and young people (Early Interventions KI) began on 31 March with a roundtable discussion organised with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The discussion focused on how empirical evidence is taken into consideration when choosing a therapeutic method for implementation. Making mental health work more evidence-based requires a long-term approach and cooperation.

The project aims to promote the nationwide implementation of effective psychosocial methods. The method adaptation process was documented for the first time in Finland during the year. In addition, indicators and tools that support the process have been identified in the international literature. The evaluation and piloting of these indicators and tools will be implemented in cooperation with the wellbeing services counties. A survey was conducted under the project on how the monitoring of methods has been implemented; for example,

19
trained evaluators

34
students in the Master's
Programme in Social
and Health Research and
Management

24
articles in the Kasvun tuki
journal

450
registered participants
in the "Implementing
effective methods" series
of webinars

822
participants in the
"Mental health in learning
environments" series of
webinars

are procedure codes used or registers of professionals compiled? The survey is used to develop the data structures of the monitoring data.

To support systematic implementation, an online course titled *Successful implementation of evidence-based methods* was created. We started a five-webinar series entitled *Implementing effective methods – how to lead the process successfully* and organised a four-webinar series entitled *Mental health in learning environments*.

A revised edition of the implementation guide was published in 2023. Itla received orders for 750 copies of the print version of the guide during the year.

We started two development processes concerning operating models. One is for situations in which there is an illness in the family. The other is for flexibly enhanced mental health support in the school setting. We started by surveying the existing methods and operating models.

We continued to cooperate with the Research Centre for Child Psychiatry of the University of Turku, and with two Dutch cooperation professors, Heleen Riper and Pim Cuijpers. Together, we organised a seminar entitled “From research to practice – on the basis of what information do we choose effective psychosocial methods for children and families?” The international exchange of information related to the core activities of Early Interventions continued in three different networks: The First 1000 Days in the Nordic Countries (2023–2027), Nordic-DataPrev and ESRII (European Society for Research on Internet Interventions).

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.

1.4 Collective impact

Itla engages in collective impact work with the regional learning network in various parts of Finland. The work is aimed at the child- and family-centred renewal of the local service ecosystem. The content-related objective of collective impact work is for development environments and services to be activated at the right time and in a manner that suits the individual's life situation, and that they support the positive growth and development of children and young people. Another objective is to support parenting to facilitate smooth daily life for children, young people and families in spite of the challenges they face.

The regional learning network and collective impact work were expanded in 2023 and now cover five wellbeing services counties: North Karelia, Central Ostrobothnia, Pirkanmaa, North Ostrobothnia and Kanta-Häme. The participating wellbeing services counties are committed to using collective impact methods in the development of the service system for families with children. Phenomenon-specific initiatives in collective impact work have also been launched in the wellbeing services county of Vantaa and Kerava (youth crime) and Helsinki (wellbeing among secondary school students).

The objectives of the regional learning network and network of researchers are

- systemic internally-driven long-term change
- a paradigm shift towards research that utilises a new translational approach to work.

In 2023, progress was made in all of Itla's cooperation areas in the development of services for families with children and service integration that takes advantage of research.

The interfaces between the family centre operating model and collective impact work have been strengthened in the structures of collective impact work. In the cooperation areas, participants from the wellbeing services county, municipalities and the third sector have organised themselves into management teams corresponding to the local solutions. The management groups provide a platform for the collaboration required by the family centre approach and the realisation of the basic principles of collective impact to support the establishment of the structures of management, development and practical activities in collective impact work.

Itla organised collective impact training three times per month through the year. Thousands of participants attended the lectures, which were organised to support the development of collective impact work.

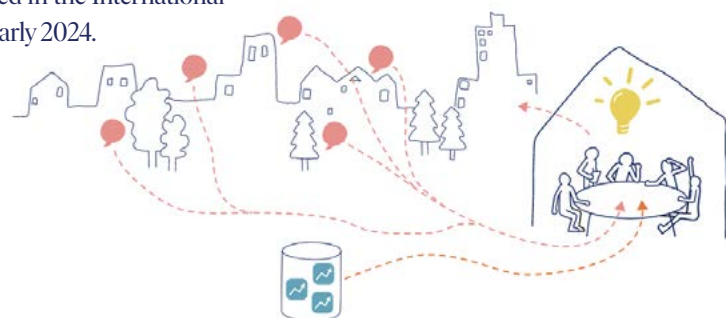
In late 2023, the concept development and building of a new shared learning platform for collective impact work began. The platform will be connected to the Itla website. The aim is that, in the future, the platform will meet the information and communication needs of the developers in the cooperation areas and all other audiences interested in collective impact work. To enhance communications about the work, the first "News about collective impact work" newsletter was published in the autumn.

- Three new wellbeing services counties joined the collective impact work: Pirkanmaa, Kanta-Häme and North Ostrobothnia
- Two cities, Helsinki and Vantaa, and a project that develops the Finnish model for leisure activities in major cities, apply the collective impact framework to current phenomena and development
- The first "News about collective impact work" newsletter came out
- A total of 15 studies were published in the research network, and research results were integrated into development efforts.

Näkymä tool for creating a situational picture

The digital Näkymä situational picture tool supports collective impact work and Itla's cooperation areas in foresight and knowledge-based management activities concerning the service needs of families with children. The development of Näkymä has continued in collaboration with Hahmota Oy and VXT Research Oy. Näkymä has been enhanced with regard to its AI-assisted semantic search functionality, for example.

Näkymä was adopted in all five of Tampere's family centre areas in 2023. The broader deployment of Näkymä has also been prepared in other areas of collective impact work. A design article on the development of the Näkymä tool was completed in December 2023 and it will be published in the International Journal of Innovation and Technology Management in early 2024.



1.5 Leadership training

Achieving societal change requires a long-term approach, the engagement of diverse operators, collaborative learning and agency. Childhood Builders leadership training is a societal change-making tool aimed at key individuals. Having a child-centred approach in services in decision-making calls for transitioning from organisation-specific or profession-specific thinking to collective action.

Itla's one-year training programmes use a coaching-style approach, are integrated into the participants' daily work and build theoretical, practical and methodological leadership competencies. They contribute to the active building of a child-friendly society through cooperation between various sectors.

The third course of Childhood Builders leadership training began in September 2023, bringing together newly appointed service area directors from the wellbeing services counties, as well as directors of education and welfare from municipalities, representing the individuals in charge of building local service packages for children, young people and families in the new administrative structure.

During the year, the participants were selected for the fourth course of Childhood Builders leadership training, which will be aimed at increasing future leadership potential. Interest in the training focused on potential was very high among future leaders in central government, the wellbeing services counties, cities, NGOs and businesses. We were able to accept 30% of the applicants into the training programme. The fourth course will start at the beginning of 2024. The participants in the training focused on potential are builders of a good future for children and families.

Childhood Builders alumni activities also started in 2023. From Itla's perspective, it is valuable that a significant proportion of the key individuals involved in child and family policy are alumni of the training programme. The new courses will further expand the alumni network, which has the potential to grow into an important platform of communication and advocacy with regard to the wellbeing of children and young people in Finland.

Highlighting the importance of leadership and related skills in responding to the challenges associated with the wellbeing of children and young people has had a positive effect on Itla's reputation. In 2023, representatives of Itla delivered a large number of talks on the topic at events organised by municipal social, health and education authorities, and Itla has received many partnership enquiries regarding future collaboration on training.

- Highlighting the importance of leadership skills in responding to the challenges associated with the wellbeing of children and young people had a positive effect on Itla's reputation.
- Itla supported the wellbeing services county reform through the third course of the Childhood Builders programme by bringing together individuals involved in building regional service packages for children, young people and families.
- The Childhood Builders alumni network started its activities.



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

The aim of the Equal Start for Everyone programme (2021–2024) is to determine the state of family and child poverty in Finland, identify effective methods to reduce it and speed up research and advocacy related to the topic.

The topics studied under the programme in 2023 included the social and health costs to families with children incurred from turning to social assistance, the correlation between receiving social assistance and the oral health of children, ways to change the child benefit system, and the poverty-reducing effect of social security for families with multiple children. In addition, a report was commissioned from the London School of Economics on international solutions for reducing family and child poverty.

In the LAPSOSET project, which began in 2023, we are working together with a research unit from the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) to produce new information on how to improve the livelihoods of low-income families with children. The project is funded by the Finnish Government's analysis and research appropriations (VN TEAS).

We further developed and updated the content of the "Family and child poverty as data" website, which was launched in 2022. An extensive pilot project was carried out with the University of Canberra on participatory modelling aimed at reducing prolonged poverty among young people.

We began a cooperation with the Finnish Youth Research Society on a project investigating youth crime. The project participants include the cities of Tampere, Oulu and Vantaa, as well as the Ministry of Education and Culture. A report on the first phase of the project was completed at the end of 2023. Itla contributes to the communication of research-based information to decision-makers and broader audiences on this topical issue.

Equal Start for Everyone Oulu pilot project

Together with the City of Oulu, we started the Equal Start for Everyone Oulu pilot project to develop a new

kind of operating model that is based on collective impact and aims to improve the resilience of children of low-income families and strengthen good daily life through the activation of leisure functions. The operating principles of the model were developed in 2023, awareness of the pilot project was raised in Oulu, and local cooperation partners were acquired. The outcome of the pilot project will be that a growing number of operators in services for adults will bring up the topic of the customer's children.

Valoisat group

The young experience leaders' Valoisat group, which started in spring 2022, participates in the Equal Start for Everyone programme's advocacy efforts, research activities and research steering. In 2023, the main focus of the work was on the planning and implementation of co-research related to coping with poverty. Itla and the Valoisat group joined the Nordforsk project, which studies the post-pandemic wellbeing of children and young people in the Nordic countries. In the project, Itla shares experiences of participatory co-research and the activities of the Valoisat group.

Itla started using the SISU microsimulation model in autumn 2023. The adoption of SISU gives Itla the ability to investigate the poverty-related impacts of changes to social security benefits and taxation. The model allows Itla to produce simulated data that only few researches are producing in Finland at present and which is useful for public officials when weighing different options.

The studies conducted under the Equal Start for Everyone programme made the news on several occasions and generated a majority of Itla's media hits. In particular, Itla's child benefit model attracted media interest and was covered by Yle, Helsingin Sanomat, Iltalehti and various regional newspapers. In addition, experts participating in the programme were invited to speak at a number of events, including discussions of poverty in the Parliament, the Human Rights Delegation and the Child Advisory Board.

- Equal Start for Everyone produced 13 studies on the causes and consequences of family and child poverty
- A pilot project began on the systemic prevention of the negative impacts of family and child poverty
- The Valoisat group's co-research pilot project and societal impact work began.

1.7 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) focuses 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 dialogue with government ministries (the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Finance) and influencing the Government Programme by preparing a summary of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic for future crisis preparedness and crisis management. An event on resilience to crises in Finland, organised in cooperation with MTV in October 2023, received extensive attention and visibility.

The Government Programme entry stating that the Prime Minister's Office will carry out an extensive external research project on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis can be considered an outcome of the PANDEMICS programme's advocacy efforts. The research project in question will be carried out in 2024–2025.

PANDEMICS and Itla organised a panel discussion at the SuomiAreena event on the topic Bringing nature back to the city – How to build a living environment that promotes health and wellbeing for future generations?

The development of advocacy efforts in the YOUNG programme began in January 2023. Over 100 cooperation partners participated in the "Research, hope and agency" stakeholder event organised at Itla in September 2023.

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

In the IMAGINE project work package implemented by Itla, 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 (data collection is under way). 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 project studies and develops services for children and young people experiencing loneliness and ostracism. 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 is funded by the Strategic Research Council and it is part of the YOUNG programme.

The research project collected and utilised 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.

Societal influence is one of the objectives of the research project. The project and its preliminary results have been discussed in various events, and participation in societal discussion has included roundtables organised by the Finnish National Agency for Education, for example. The research project has also engaged in co-development with the youth services of the City of Helsinki.

Changing Population – Impact of Demographic Change on Early Childhood Education and Pre-primary and Basic Education

The Changing Population project studied the impact of demographic change on early childhood education and pre-primary and basic education, using a multidisciplinary approach. The project conducted an expert panel (with approximately 40 participants) on the impact of demographic change on the future of equality in education using the Delphi method.

The research project showed that, due to demographic change, foresight and consulting children will be important in municipalities going forward. The project prepared a set of quality criteria for the consultation of children and young people in decision-making, as well as new types of indicators for municipalities to monitor demographic change.

The interim report of the research project was published in February and the final report in November 2023. A five-part blog series and a handbook on consulting children have also been published as part of the project.

The research project was funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and part of the Right to Learn development programme. The study was carried out by Itla, the University of Helsinki and the consulting company MDI, which specialises in regional development. The project was concluded at the end of 2023.

1.8 Communications and events

In spring 2023, in the run-up to the parliamentary elections, we published messages targeted at decision-makers on the importance of reducing family and child poverty and supporting the mental health of young people. The messages were published in video and blog format on the Itla website.

The themes of family and child poverty and mental health remained prominent throughout the year. The child benefit calculations of the “Equal Start for Everyone – solutions to family and child poverty” programme attracted media interest in particular. Itla’s reports were also referenced in autumn 2023 in a number of statements concerning the Government’s legislative amendments.

Itla was mentioned in online media on a total of 117 occasions. In addition, Itla’s publications were referenced in various statements on 15 occasions, including the Ombudsman for Children’s statement to the Social Affairs and Health Committee on the Government proposal for the amendment of the Act on Social Assistance. Other topics that were highlighted in the media included the appointments of Members of Parliament to Itla’s Delegation, Itla’s change of CEO, and Ministry of Education and Culture funding for a project on the Finnish model for leisure activities in five major cities, in which Itla is involved.

Itla issued three statements in 2023.

Itla’s website was redesigned in 2023 and the new website went live in January 2024.

Itla is a member of the Children’s Rights Communication Network and participated in communications on children’s rights on social media. The theme of the year was children’s right to wellbeing. Itla also participated in the Foundation Acts campaign on the annual European Day of Foundations and Donors. In the campaign, we highlighted up-to-date research-based information produced by the Equal Start for Everyone programme on family and child poverty and articles published in the Kasvun tuki journal.

6

publications

30

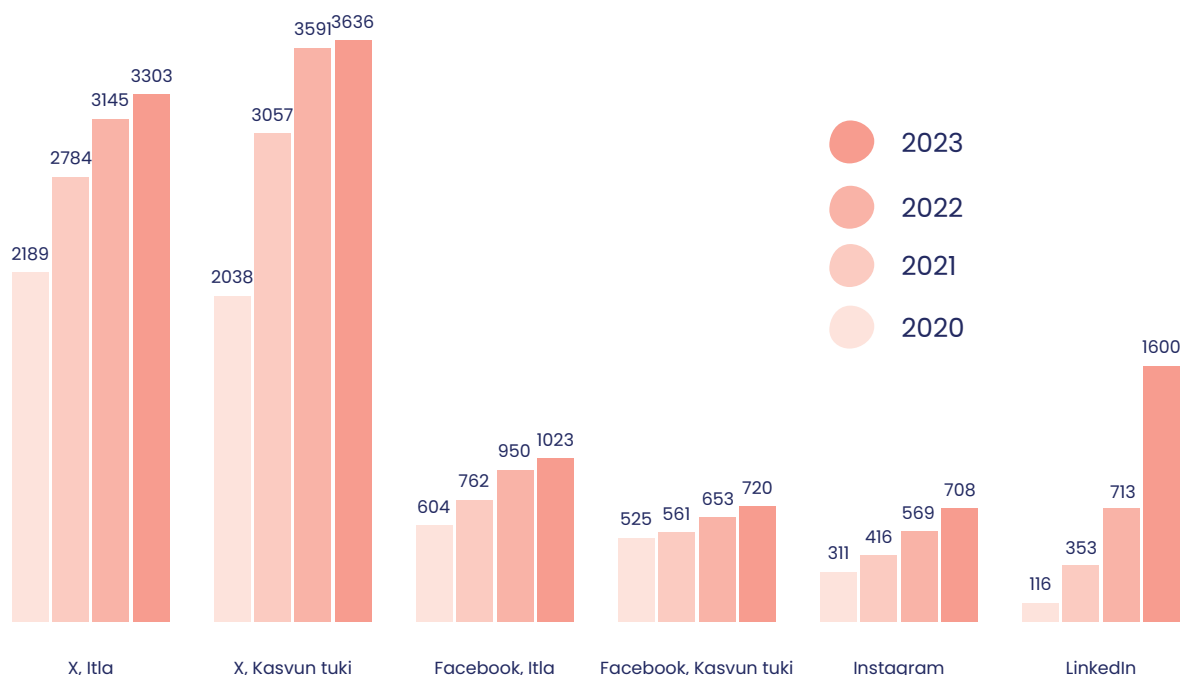
news articles

16

blog posts

11

episodes of the Childhood Builders podcast and one Triangeli discussion



Events

Itla organised a total of 20 online, hybrid and in-person events in 2023. Publication events were organised for the reports of the Changing Population project, an international comparison of solutions to family and child poverty, the child benefit system and the current situation of young people placed in the special care units of the State’s reform schools. Early Interventions organised series of webinars on the implementation of methods and mental health in learning environments, as well as a publication event for the revised implementation guide and theme-specific “pit stop” events related to implementation.

The quality of communications is high – concreteness is needed

A stakeholder survey was conducted in spring and summer 2023 on Itla’s positioning in the field of the wellbeing of children, young people and families, awareness of Itla’s activities and Itla’s communications.

The survey included interviews with 20 stakeholder representatives and an online survey that had 93 respondents. The largest groups of respondents were representatives of associations and foundations (33%) and municipalities and wellbeing services counties (26%).

According to the survey, Itla is perceived as an expert organisation that, in an inspiring and impactful manner, creates a knowledge base to support the wellbeing of children and families. Itla was characterised as a reliable, bold, clear, creative, innovative and development-oriented organisation.

42,000
visitors to itla.fi

162,000
page views on itla.fi

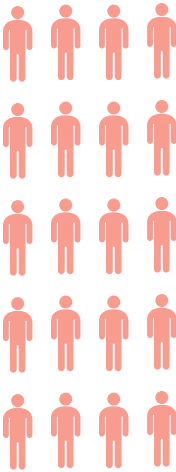
49,000
visitors to kasvuntuki.fi

152,000
page views on kasvuntuki.fi



20

interviewees representing key stakeholders.



“Itla has very up-to-date forms of activity that are in the spirit of the times. Itla is also a pioneer. Itla always has an answer to the questions that are being pondered in the field of families with children. Itla’s activities are modern.”

Itla is relatively well-known among stakeholders, and their perceptions are positive, but awareness of Itla is not as strong outside the key stakeholders.

The interviews highlighted the practical relevance of Itla’s work and emphasis on genuine action, meaning fruitful work that benefits all of the parties involved. At the same time, there was a desire for even more practical forms of activity, but also the strengthening of long-term strategic research. The respondents also expressed a wish for active dialogue and cooperation with other parties in the same field; in particular, stronger exchange of information with the wellbeing services counties’ services for children and families was seen as necessary.

Itla’s communications are perceived to be high-quality and expert-led. From the perspective of broader societal impact and renewal, the respondents expressed a wish for approachable communications that extend to a more concrete level.

“The information produced by Itla should be easy to use and suitable for being embedded in context.”

Itla’s communications reach the interviewed stakeholders particularly through newsletters and social media. The respondents encouraged Itla to disseminate research-based knowledge more broadly through different channels.

1.9 Endowed professorships and cooperation agreements

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. A cooperation agreement has been signed with the Research Centre for Child Psychiatry of the University of Turku, with a focus on research collaboration on digital mental health interventions aimed at young people and students, as well as content planning and advocacy efforts for intervention and implementation training modules.





2

Administration and personnel

Itla 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 2023 was 37.

Itla's delegation is tasked with monitoring, supporting and promoting Itla'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 Itla 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

Asset management and finances

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 2023 was EUR 2,760,725.92 in total. The deficit for the financial period was EUR -744,208.94 (a deficit of EUR -4,836,406.75 in 2022).



4

Outlook for 2024

Our operating environment in 2024 will still be characterised by the operations of the wellbeing services counties being in their early stages and subject to new changes. Finances are becoming tighter in the wellbeing services counties and in municipalities, and there are personnel shortages in social and health services as well as municipal education administrations.

Structural reforms and dwindling financial resources are making it necessary to change operating practices. New cooperation structures are being created between the wellbeing services counties and municipal education administrations to replace the links that were severed due to the reforms. In such times of changes, it is important to ensure that there are no service gaps that could lead to children and young people falling through the cracks.

Demographic changes create challenges to society with regard to the provision of social and healthcare services as well as education. There is a need to invest in the declining number of families with children and take different groups into consideration to prevent differences between population groups from growing excessively.

There is national demand for implementation competence in psychosocial methods for children and young people. The objective of the reform of social services and healthcare outlined in Prime Minister Orpo's Government Programme is to strengthen the structures and competence for the assessment of effective practices with proven cost-effectiveness. In the education administration in basic services, there is a lot of demand for mental health identification and support, such as classroom management methods and strengthening mental health skills.

Reforms also bring new opportunities, which have been given less attention, at least in the public discussion. Cooperation with the field also highlights the need for cooperation and the spirit of cooperation.

Iita's outlook for 2024 is to continue and deepen the activities that are already under way.

The geographical expansion of collective impact work accelerates the reform of the service system towards comprehensive, early-stage, effective and research-based collaboration. The regional learning network has expanded from four wellbeing services counties to seven, and negotiations are under way with new wellbeing services counties. The Childhood Builders network of pilot proj-

ects and researchers accelerates change through pilot projects and translational research.

Family and child poverty has not been eradicated from Finland. Research on family and child poverty focuses on measures that can reduce family and child poverty, and co-research methods are used to find information and solutions related to resilience in the context of poverty.

We will increase research-based expertise in the assessment, selection, implementation and monitoring of psychosocial methods for children and young people. Itla can provide the service system with tools that promote literacy in evidence-based intervention and implementation competence in decision-making. We are actively involved in strengthening intervention and implementation competence as part of the reform of social and healthcare services.

The changes underscore the need for new leadership approaches and competencies. The Childhood Builders leadership training responds to this need not only through training targeted at directors of the wellbeing services counties but also by training the directors of the future. Multidisciplinary leadership and cooperation structures are also at the core of collective impact.

Under the pressure of crises and changes, it is important to remember to look to the future. Today's decisions and actions shape the future.

Although the media is dominated by crises and scandals, and the atmosphere in society cultivates an ethos of threats, the Science Barometer indicates that people in Finland trust in science. Nevertheless, there is skepticism and division in attitudes towards scientific knowledge.

Itla's activities are firmly based on the dissemination, utilisation and processing of evidence-based information. Our eyes are firmly set on the future. How do we combine the scientific knowledge that has already been accumulated with foresight into future scenarios to support decision-making?

What kinds of images of the future does the prevailing atmosphere communicate to children and young people? What kind of thinking and discussion do we need presently regarding the issues concerning children, young people and families? Do we provide children and young people with adequate cognitive skills to navigate this complex world and the flood of information?

"Better thinking leads to better action. We need more future-oriented thinking to address issues related to the wellbeing of children and young people. Future-oriented thinking refers to the ability to think about how the future is influencing things today, and how today's decisions and choices influence the future. Systems thinking is an integral part of future-oriented thinking, which is necessary in practice when we analyse the relationships, interdependencies, and interactions between things," says CEO Katri Vataja.

In 2024, we will clarify Itla's vision of a desired future. We will establish impact goals that will guide our longer-term planning and choices. We will strengthen our societal impact, as well as impact assessment. We also want to create space and the courage to introduce to the discussion new ideas on ways to strengthen the wellbeing of children, young people and families now and in the future.

"Better thinking leads to better action. We need more future-oriented thinking to address issues related to the wellbeing of children and young people."





Financial statements for the financial period

1 January 2023–31 December 2023

Itla Children's Foundation
1573913-1

INCOME STATEMENT

	1 Jan–31 Dec 2023	1 Jan–31 Dec 2022
Operating activities		
Income	1,345,545.47	379,750.68
Expenses		
Personnel expenses	-2,142,855.98	-1,597,063.17
Depreciation	-2,387.97	-3,033.96
Other expenses	-1,824,080.71	-1,592,021.01
	-3,969,324.66	-3,192,118.14
Surplus/deficit	-2,623,779.19	-2,812,367.46
Investment and financing activities		
Income from investment activities	3,389,047.47	2,083,133.31
Expenses of investment activities	-1,509,477.22	-4,107,172.60
	1,879,570.25	-2,024,039.29
Profit (loss) for the financial year	-744,208.94	-4,836,406.75

BALANCE SHEET

	31 Dec 2023	31 Dec 2022
ASSETS		
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Tangible assets		
Machinery and equipment	7,163.89	9,551.86
Investments		
Other shares and participations	50,785,135.57	51,149,290.12
Total non-current assets	50,792,299.46	51,158,841.98
CURRENT ASSETS		
Receivables		
Non-current receivables		
Other receivables	2,275.69	13,777.69
Current receivables		
Accounts receivable	297,056.44	385,697.93
Other receivables	4,904.33	16,795.30
Accrued income	239,664.21	193,630.00
Total current receivables	541,624.98	596,123.23
Total receivables	543,900.67	609,900.92
Cash and cash equivalents	3,825,661.42	3,454,131.25
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	4,369,562.09	4,064,032.17
TOTAL ASSETS	55,161,861.55	55,222,874.15
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
EQUITY		
Basic capital	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	4,523,939.06	9,360,345.81
Profit/loss for the financial period	-744,208.94	-4,836,406.75
TOTAL EQUITY	53,830,135.50	54,574,344.44
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Advances received	527,504.21	155,983.20
Accounts payable	433,211.59	226,794.87
Other liabilities	83,768.68	61,587.99
Accruals and deferred income	287,241.57	204,163.65
Total liabilities	1,331,726.05	648,529.71
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	55,161,861.55	55,222,874.15

