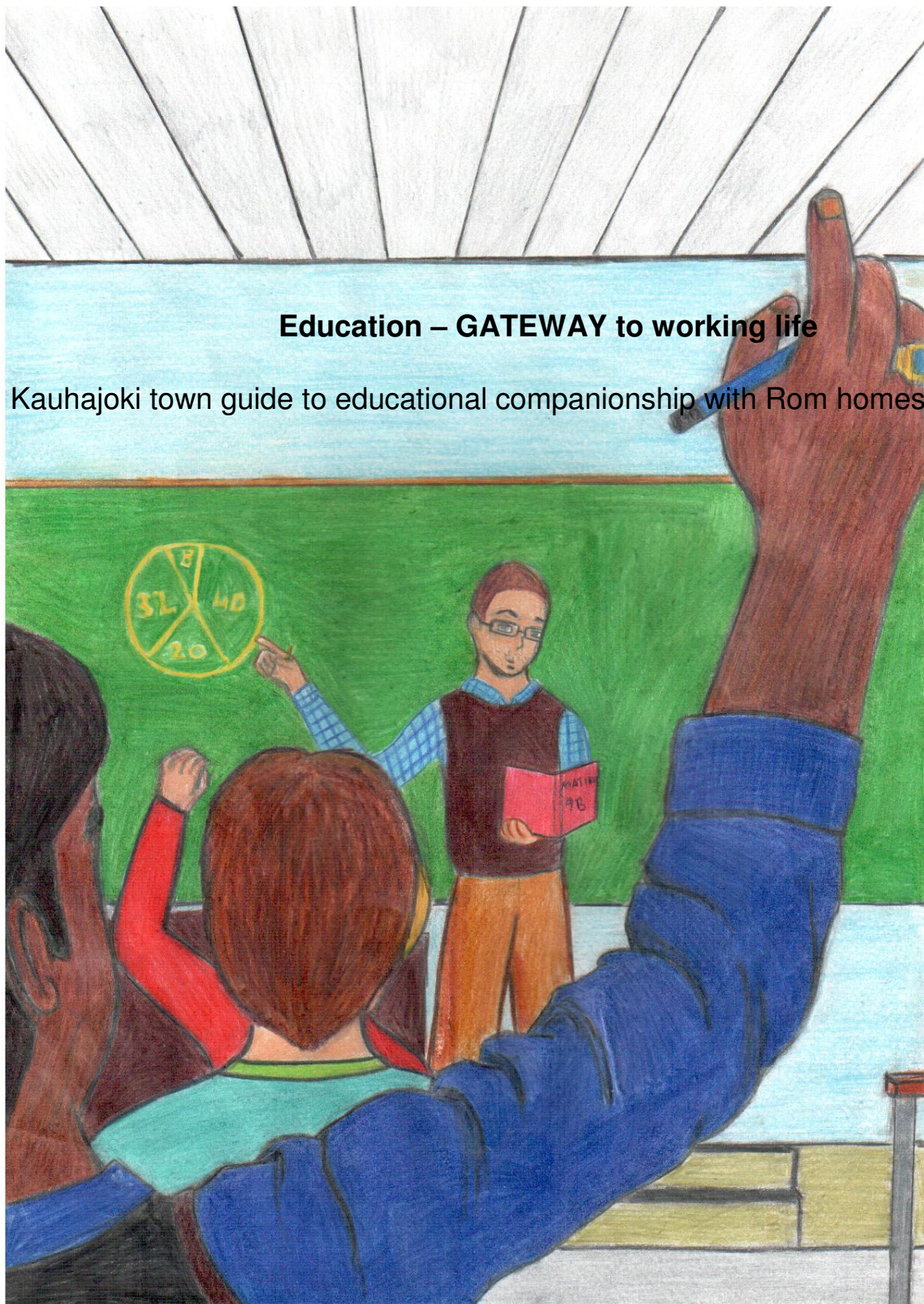


Education – GATEWAY to working life

Kauhajoki town guide to educational companionship with Rom homes



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1 FOR THE READER

It is not until in the past few years that people have become to understand the fact that Romani children and youth need to be offered support with their schooling. The officials have lacked information as well as courage to find out what the Rom culture consists of. There is also little written information available due to the nature of the Romani culture.

Kauhajoki town received designated state funding for the supporting the elementary schooling of Rom children. A steering group of various local professionals forming a multiprofessional team was appointed for the project. The prerequisite for being granted the state funding was that the town was to draft a plan of supporting the elementary schooling of Romani children and apply the plan thus creating a method permanently present in the everyday life in schools and in the town. Therefore Kauhajoki town decided to, as a part of the strategy, produce a guide to help establish co-operation between schools and homes as well as to support the pupils.

The objective of this guide is to introduce the means of support found necessary in the schooling of the Roma as well as to offer concrete advice to teachers and Rom families on how to create a goal-orientated educational companionship. The guide is aimed at Rom parents, teaching staff as well as other people working with Rom families and children. The guide bases on my personal knowledge and experience of the Rom culture. The steering group has guided me to pay special focus on the areas that especially call for conscious support. Whilst working in a school community I have been asked to tell about the Romani culture and been also asked plenty of questions concerning it.

As a result of a local council decision, Kauhajoki has had an active Romani Affairs Committee since 2002. The goal of the committee is to support the social integration of the Roma in the various areas of administration. As a representative of the committee I considered it very important to support the schooling of Rom children as a result of which myself and Director of Education Kari Nuuttila created a post of a Rom worker for schools.

Both teachers as well as Rom parents have very much valued the work of the employee familiar with the Rom culture. Now the steering group has regarded it necessary to extend this well-functioning post to cover all the different stages in a child's life with the support of an employee familiar with the Rom culture. Due to the vast amount of work it is impossible for just one employee to carry out the task alone. The idea is to offer the input of three different employees familiar with the Rom culture in the transitional stages of children's life. This form of support can prevent the social exclusion of Rom children and youth.

In daycare a child has the opportunity of getting to feel responsibility over others and to learn to read their needs. In early childhood children have a keen sense of equality along with which they learn to get to know different kinds of people without prejudice. Daycare together with pre-primary education supports entering elementary school. A Rom family needs information on the importance of attending daycare and preschool as well as about the school culture and conventions. Elementary schooling is a firm base rock that serves as a solid stepping stone for moving onto vocational education. The practical model for educational companionship with a Rom home introduced in this guide has been approved by the Kauhajoki town Board of Education. Therefore it can be considered an official Kauhajoki town method.

At Kauhajoki, 20 January 2009

Kirsi Grönstrand

2 METHODS ARE FORMED THROUGH CO-OPERATION

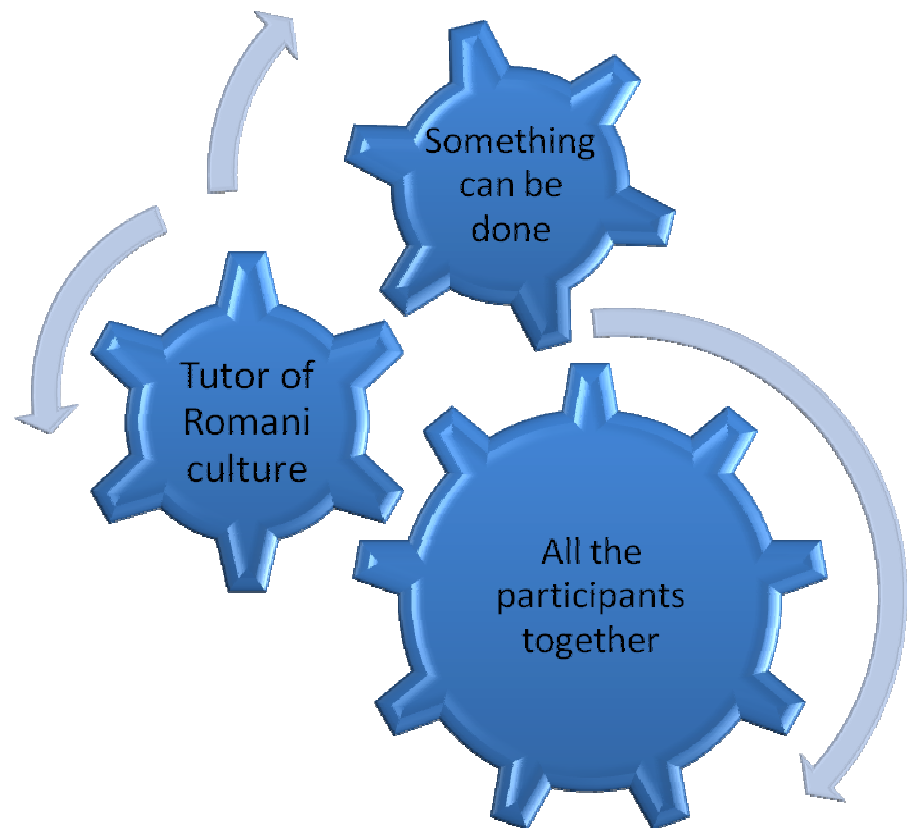
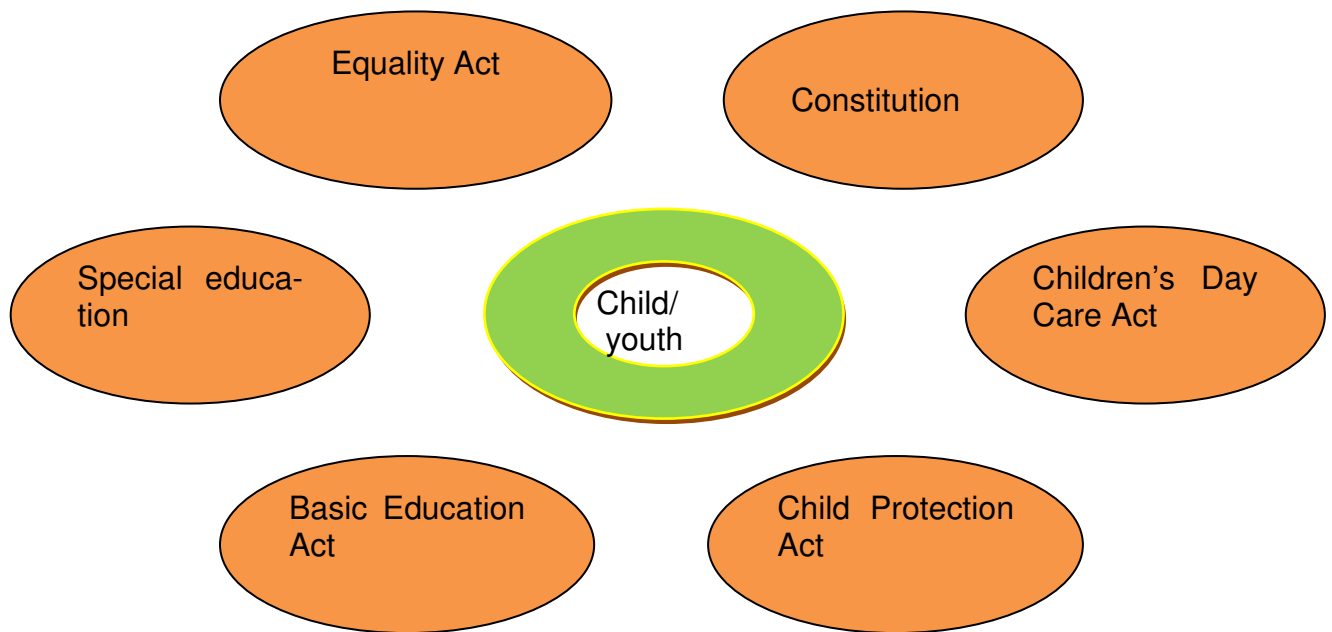


Chart 1: Significance of co-operation

Parents are always the people primarily responsible for their child's upbringing. The purpose of daycare, pre-primary and school staff is to support the upbringing task of the homes. From a child's point of view it is important to create a confidential connection between the staff at daycare, pre-primary education as well as school staff and home. Schools are responsible for teaching and education during school hours. Schools must see to the fact that Rom parents as well as parents in general have enough information on how they can follow and promote their children's schooling and learning. The work of early childhood education professionals as well as school staff with regards to Romani children can be supported by hiring an employee familiar with the Rom culture to co-operate between the school and Romani homes. Rom families do not necessarily have knowledge of the school culture nor its conventions which is why they require versatile support.

The significance of co-operation is especially underlined in the transitional stages in which a child moves from daycare to pre-primary education (at age 6 in Finland) and elementary schooling (which in Finland consists of primary school [years 1 to 6] and lower secondary aka middle school [years 7 to 9]) and then on to further studies. Schools have representatives of a number of different professional groups looking after the children's welfare. The welfare and sense of security of Romani children can be supported by hiring an employee familiar with the Rom culture into the working community.

3 LEGISLATION TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH



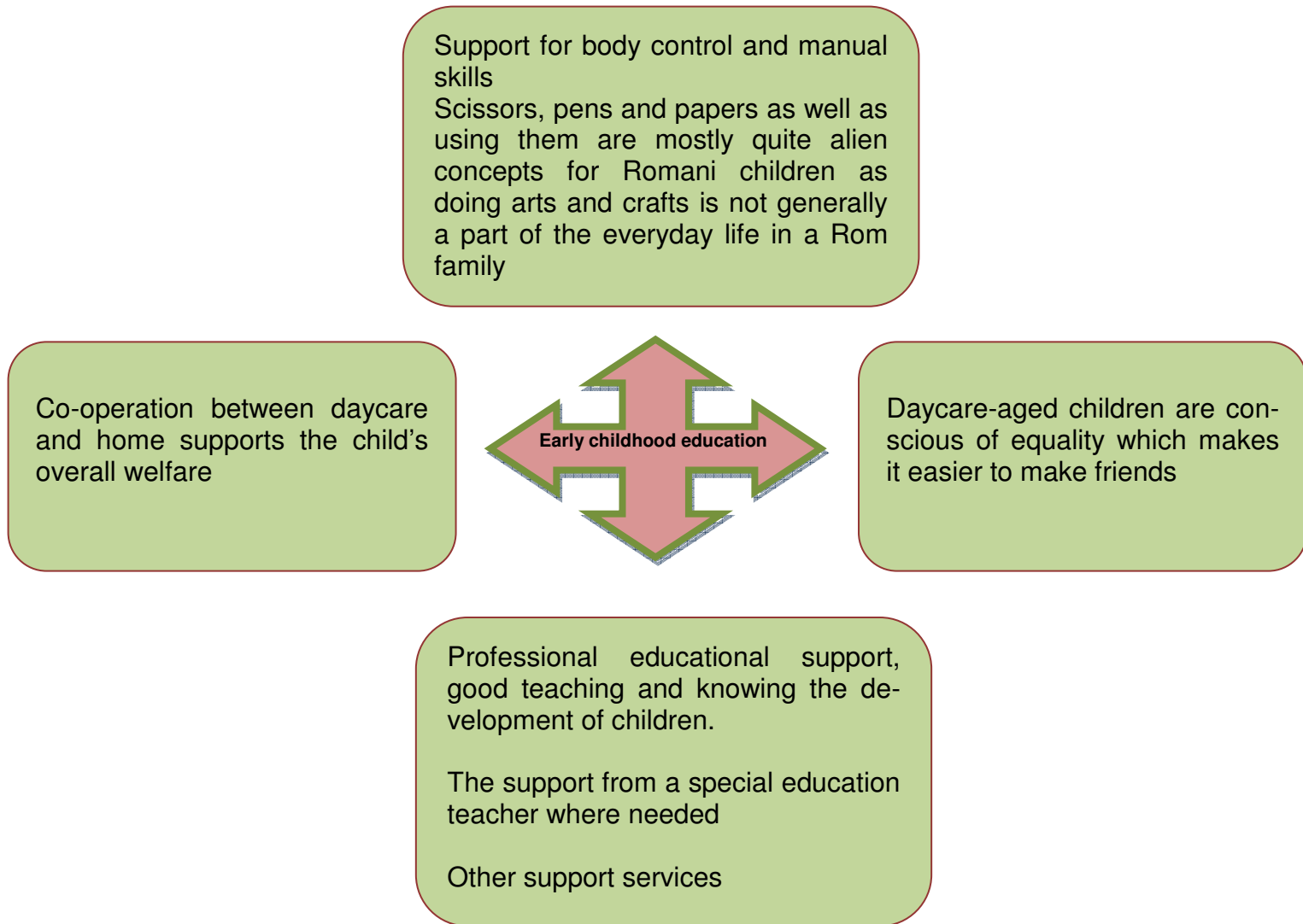
In Finland, legislation secures the realisation of the citizens' rights. We have compiled some of the most central acts of which Rom parents as well as parents in general should have information. The officials are obligated to offer information and guidance with matters to do with the legislation and its contents. They also have to have the understanding as to how the legislation should be harnessed to support a child's growth and development.

Educational companionship can not be established by force but through openness as well as the common agreement and co-operation of all parties. In order to guarantee the growth and welfare of Rom children and youth it is very important to have employees familiar with the Rom culture working with Rom families. This increases the sense of security for Romani families.

- According to the Constitution, the Roma have the right to maintain and develop their culture.
- Rom parents should be encouraged to be active and seek a daycare place for their child. Daycare offers a stimulating environment for children's growth and development and allows the child the opportunity to make friends.
- Romani identity as such is not a reason to be moved to special education.

4 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AS A SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

Early childhood education is educational interaction of children not yet in school. It's goal is to promote the healthy growth, development and learning of children.



- If at the maternity and child health clinic any concern arises over a child's development or skills and Romani parents find it difficult to be motivated for further examination, an employee familiar with the Romani culture especially hired for the field of early childhood education could help the situation by supporting both the family as well as the clinic.
- In pre-primary education children's social skills are polished and readiness to start school is created. Pre-primary education also maps out children's

possible learning difficulties and forms of support he or she may need after moving on to school.

- A Rom child grows up within the Rom home and family. His or her first day at school may well be the first time he encounters the world outside. When a child has had the possibility to attend daycare and pre-primary education, starting actual school is easier thanks to the friendships already bound. Therefore the child does not have to face a new phase in his life alone but together with his possible friends. This supports the child's development and along with it the child grows, both physically as well as mentally, more ready to start school.
- An employee familiar with the Rom culture belonging to daycare and pre-primary education staff shapes the attitudes of the staff, Rom families as well as pre-primary children and their families into a more positive direction.



5 COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Society along with its laws enters a child's life as the journey through school begins. Children and youth aged 7 to 16 are legally obligated to attend school. During the years of elementary schooling the development of a child's persona is rich and multiform. Each child has his own personality. Some may be ready for school a year prior to the usual age and, respectively, others may need more time before they start school. A child who is ready for school is individually mature on an emotional and social level as well as with regards to his motor skills. (Arajärvi 1992, 13, 17.)

According to the Constitution 25§ each child permanently living in Finland is obligated to attend school beginning from the year he or she turns 7. Compulsory education ends when the 9 years of elementary education are completed or when 10 years have passed since the beginning of one's compulsory education. (L 21.8.1998/628).

Teachers play a significant role in the everyday life of a school child. They are the part-time helpers and supporters of the child. The teacher has the means to support the pupils' studies in just the right ways at the right time. A positive atmosphere in the school as well as getting to maintain a certain curiosity towards learning do a lot for the child's ability to absorb information. This is something teachers should encourage. An adult in the classroom not only provides mental challenges but also offers experiences and sensations. (Aho 1997, 47.) It is very important for a Romani child to gain the teacher's attention and feel that the teacher is treating him or her equally. Over his lifespan a Romani child may have noticed that the main society treats the Roma stereotypically. A little positive attention supports the pupil's self-esteem and his feeling of being approved as a person.

The objective of the teaching defined in the Basic Education Act is to support the pupils' growth into humanity and into ethically responsible members of society as well as to provide them with the knowledge and skills required in life. In addition to this, the objective of pre-primary instruction is to, for its part, improve the learning

prerequisites of the children. According to the Basic Education Act 2§, teaching shall promote sophistication as well as equality in society and pupils' prerequisites for participating in education and otherwise developing themselves during their lives. *According to 3§, those providing education shall co-operate with pupils' parents or carers.* Furthermore, according to the Basic Education Act §10 the language of instruction and the language used in extracurricular teaching is Finnish or Swedish, but the language of instruction may also be Saame, Roma or sign language. (L 21.8.1998/628.)

The state supports the teaching of Romani by paying 86 % of the teacher's salary. The challenge is not so much the actual organising of lessons in schools with Romani children as it is finding teachers.

5.1 Curriculum

Education providers are responsible for drafting and developing the curriculum. The curriculum sets the educational and instructional work in elementary education as well as defines the objectives and contents set in the foundations whilst also taking into account all the other, smaller things involved in providing education. In his or her teaching, a teacher must follow the curriculum verified by the organisers. (Kauhajoki town curriculum 2004, 3.)

5.2 Pupil care

A pupil care group is a multiprofessional committee at school whose task is to support the teachers' instructional work, parents' educational work as well as the pupils' learning and growth. The pupil care group may consist of the headmaster, a special education teacher, a class room teacher, school counselor, school nurse as well as an employee familiar with the Rom culture. (Kauhajoki town curriculum 2004, 36.)

At times a pupils' studies do not proceed as planned despite the fact that the pupil care group has, together with the parents, discussed and analysed the pupil's personal situation as well as offered supporting action organised by the school. If the concern over the pupil is still present and increasing, the school must file a child protection report according to the Child Protection Act.

6 ROM CULTURE AND SCHOOL



- In a Romani family a child may need special support in his or her studies due to the weak education his parents have received. Helping with homework may seem challenging at home.
- A Rom family requires information about the school culture and conventions.
- If a pupil has not done his homework, the teacher should not hesitate to contact the pupil's parents over the matter and find out whether the parents are able to support the pupil in a sufficient way.
- A Rom child or youth must obey the general rules and norms at school. Exceptional situations may be negotiated upon provided they do not violate the equal rights of other pupils.

- Due to reasons of pudency, a Rom youth can not show a test on human biology at home. In a situation such as this the teacher may ask a pupil if he or she needs help getting her guardian's signature. In order to ease the situation, the teacher may offer the pupil a chance to ask for the signature of Roma parents onto a separate piece of paper instead. This note could, for example, be top part of the exam paper that includes the pupil's name, test area and numeral evaluation. The feeling of pudency is quite individual and it can not be assumed that the same applies to all pupils.
- Pupil care looks after the physical, mental as well as the social welfare of children and youth. Its purpose is also to prevent social exclusion. For a Rom pupil, cultural identity is a part of welfare. This is why it is important to have a person familiar with the Rom culture in the committee. It is a way of ensuring that the Romani pupils' welfare is supported multiprofessionally.
- Due to reasons of pudency, Romani youth do not discuss matters to do with maturing with their parents but seek answers to their questions about puberty from the school nurse, health education class or relatives of the same age.

6.1 Co-operation between home and school

- When viewing the differences between people it is better to focus on the common trades rather than on what is different.
- Differences created by culture can not hinder co-operation. Officials should find out about the Romani culture in order to boost their professional skills. Knowing the Romani culture helps fade out stereotypes. The more facts one knows the less fiction one believes.
- Open dialogue, appropriate information as well as being conscious and aware can resolve many problems and conflicts and thereby prevent misunderstandings.
- There are various guides that help co-operate with the Roma. At work places a Rom coworker can act as an 'open guide' or a cultural interpreter to whom questions can be directed.
- Good co-operation comes from mutual respect and trust.

- In addition to using the help of a tutor familiar with the Rom culture, telephones are also a good way of keeping in contact with Romani homes.
- Early help made possible at the school age supports Rom pupils as well as helps them settle in and prevents social exclusion. If the will to learn fades and learning difficulties increase, action should be taken swiftly. The significance of peer support is accentuated at this stage in particular. A Rom pupil benefits from being supported and encouraged by an employee familiar with the Romani culture who also acts as a bridge builder in the co-operation between the school and the Rom home. Problems do not swell out of proportion if concerns are flagged and acted upon at an early stage following the methods of early support. Multiprofessional co-operation supports each party with a common objective.

Pre-primary teachers develop children's learning capacities by supporting positive growth, development and learning prerequisites.

Primary school teachers instruct and educate. They plan and carry out teaching based on the curriculum.

Special education teachers teach children and youth with mild learning difficulties.

Employees familiar with the Rom culture work as tutors in schools as well as bridge builders in the co-operation between homes and schools.

Special needs assistants work at schools supporting pupils' learning, growth and development

Guidance counselors guide pupils and students with planning their studies, applying for further studies and aiming at working life

School nurses focus mainly on following and supporting the physical and mental growth of children and youth.

School counselors aim at preventing pupils' problems by supporting their mental and social growth and development

Chart 2: The multiprofessional network of co-operation supporting education



6.2 Teacher-parent meetings

- Teacher-parent meetings are a forum for discussing the child's development.
- In Romani families it is usually the mothers who come to the teacher-parent meetings but fathers are also just as welcome to attend.
- Co-operation between school and home is equally as significant to both parties.
- Physiological matters are not discussed in the presence of the youth due to pudency.
- Matters hindering the growth or development of children or youth can be discussed with Rom parents.

6.2.1 School food

- Traditional Finnish foods are also familiar to Romani families. If a child has any allergies restricting his/her diet, the school kitchen must be delivered a doctor's certificate. A Romani diet does not differ from that of other Finns. The Romani religion or culture do not pose dietary restrictions.

- Cleanliness is indicative of the Rom culture and does also reflect on the mealtimes at school. Should cutlery or food fall to the floor, a Romani child or youth would not be able to eat it or with it as he or she would consider it impure. Being allowed clean cutlery or for example bread is necessary.
- In school a general rule is that overcoats or hats may not be worn when eating. A Romani youth in his puberty will not be seen in a t-shirt in the company of elder Roma and will usually refuse to remove his jacket. If the school allows him or her to wear a jacket, it may cause confusion amongst the other pupils in the school. Therefore the youth should be instructed to dress in a way that, should he have to remove his jacket, his cultural identity would not be violated.

6.2.2 Physical Education

- In primary school, Romani children have no cultural reason not to attend PE lessons.
- The Romani culture is no reason not to participate in sports but, in certain situations, it does call for some creativity and fine adjusting from the organising teacher's part. A Romani youth can wear appropriate sports equipment when the lesson is not held in a public area.
- Possible special arrangement needs are good to be negotiated with the staff member familiar with the Rom culture such as in cases in which the PE lessons are held in a swimming hall.
- If a Romani pupil demands special arrangements for PE based on his or her state of health, he or she must present a doctor's certificate.

6.2.3 School journey

- School journeys are a part of the everyday life of school children. The Romani culture does not prohibit using public transport.
- Taxi rides to school are possible if the child's guardian has presented a doctor's certificate which has been approved by the school officials.

7 BRIDGE BUILDER AND CULTURAL INTERPRETER

7.1 An employee familiar with the Rom culture

- The presence of a Romani adult as well as his or her being a part of the teaching staff has a positive effect on the developing self-esteem of a Rom child. It also creates a feeling of belonging to the group.
- Moving from one school stage to another is a critical stage in the education of Rom children. In transitional stages, multiprofessional co-operation is accentuated in the home–school co-operation.
- Attitude education is underlined when the employee familiar with the Rom culture not only works amongst the Rom children but also offers help and support for all pupils regardless their background.

7.2 Lower secondary school, time of turnover

- Moving from primary school onto lower secondary (middle school) is a difficult stage over which youth need special support. At this stage co-operation between the home and the school should be particularly close.
- During years 7 to 9 a Rom youth often requires more help than other adolescents the same age as she or he battles with questions of identity.
- The presence of an employee familiar with the Rom culture in a school community is vital with respect to the youth growing into adulthood.
- Unauthorised absences should be notified to the parents. If the youth has no valid reason to be absent from class, the situation should be handled according to the school conventions. The employee familiar with the Rom culture can, for example, collect the youth from home. In a like situation, a pupil from the mainstream culture can be collected from home by the school guidance counselor.

8 DISCOVERING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY



8.1 From elementary school to vocation

- In lower secondary school, input from a guidance counselor is extremely valuable when a Romani youth is choosing his or her future profession. The guidance counselors should encourage and support Romani youth in applying for training that offers them an opportunity to get a profession that is both sensible as well as financially profitable. In modern society, sewing and horses are not financially profitable career choices.
- Co-operation between the guidance counselor and the employee familiar with the Rom culture is important when supporting the youth.

- It may be difficult for a Romani youth to find a work place for the Practical Professional Orientation period due to his or her ethnic orientation. The guidance counselor's help is required should such a case emerge.
- In order for a Rom youth to discover his or her professional identity, each party must be committed to the matter. For young people, goals may not be so clear at first. They will, however, gradually clarify with the help of people with whom the youth interacts.
- Without training it is difficult to gain an equal position in the employment market. Early intervention can prevent leaving school after lower secondary and stop a possible cycle of social exclusion.



8.2 After compulsory education

- The active labour market policy methods are diverse when it comes to early school leavers. Customers must be committed to the job seeking plans drafted for them.
- If a customer has no idea or wishes on what type of career to get into, planning may become easier after an orientation period.
- Active labour market training or apprenticeship training act as stepping stones for those without a profession.
- The Roma generally have low self-esteem and thus they may need to be encouraged and trusted in order to discover their own resources.
- A work coach familiar with the Rom culture offers peer support for Romani customers in adult education.
- If there are no employees or bridge builders familiar with the Rom culture available in the town, one can be trained through active labour market policy courses.

9 AN EMPLOYEE FAMILIAR WITH THE ROM CULTURE AS A BRIDGE BUILDER

9.1 Educational companionship for the best of a child

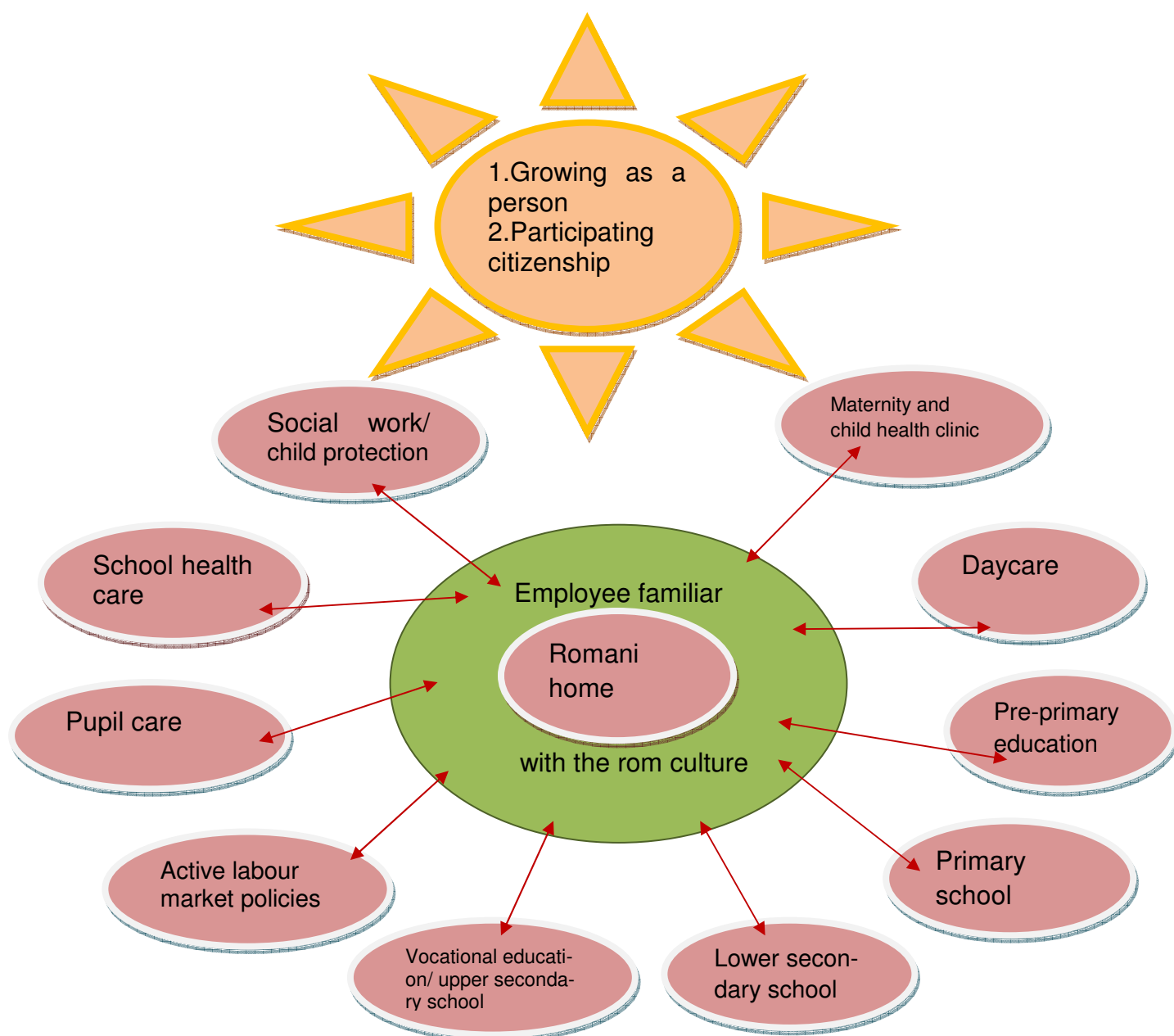


Chart 3: Educational companionship with a Rom home

A Rom child's life begins with being born to a Rom family, a Romani home. As he or she grows older, her life will inevitably be touched by various public services such as child health clinics and daycare. Co-operation between Rom families and the officials does not necessarily go smoothly if it is made more difficult by, for example, prejudice from both sides. Insufficient interaction between Rom families and service providers may continue as long as throughout a lifetime. Establishing an educational companionship can be promoted by hiring an employee familiar with the Rom culture for all the different stages of children's growth. The Kauhajoki town model of educational companionship with a Rom home is clarified in the chart (chart 3). By hiring three employees familiar with the Rom culture according to this model, a town can potentially make savings in the long run when integration is supported through the means portrayed in this guide.

9.2. The Kauhajoki town model

The pre-primary education tutor acts as a bridge builder between pre-primary education and a Romani home. This employee familiar with the Rom culture mainly works as a staff member of the working community. Where necessary, he or she transfers to a special post offering professional support for daycare professionals in, for examples, cases where delays in a child's development call for further examination but the parents are reluctant or unable to see what is best for the child in the matter. With the parents' consent, the bridge builder supports the co-operation between the family and the child health clinic in order to reach a solution that is in the best interest of the child. Another possibility is that the employee familiar with the Rom culture acts as a town family worker and, where necessary, adopts a special role in matters to do with Rom families. A pre-primary tutor offers support for children starting primary school. She or he is available for the needs of pre-primary and primary education as well as daycare.

A Romani language teacher circulates in schools that have Rom pupils. Where necessary, she supports the co-operation between the school and Rom families. In addition to teaching Romani, the teacher works as an equal employee in the everyday life of the schools and is involved in multiprofessional co-operation.

In lower secondary school and in further studies the employee familiar with the Rom culture works in the same manner as the ones working with younger pupils. The difficulties of studying create challenges for any youth in their puberty. For Romani youth, this stage is even a little harder as they also self-explore through their cultural identity. An employee working with youth this age must invest special interest in Romani youth moving onto further studies. The active labour market policy possibilities are very diverse. They can offer support for youth over the age of 17 who have failed to receive their final report from elementary school.

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