

# ASUKASVIESTI <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2020</sub>

**Celebration  
of light in  
Virontörmä**

PAGE 3



## **ALAA ENJOYS LIVING IN VUORES**

PAGE 4-6

**VTS**  
KODIT

*An anniversary  
year has  
started*

PAGE 2

*Kototori  
gives advice  
to immigrants*

PAGE 6

*Rents, rates  
and fees  
in 2020*

PAGE 7



# FIFTY YEARS OLD AND STILL IN SHAPE



We have renewed our visual look

**AN ANNIVERSARY** year has started for us. Come and join the celebration! VTS-kodit is now a spry fifty-year-old but is not showing its age. On the contrary, we are constantly improving our operations in good cooperation with our tenants and staff. We want to provide a platform for a good life for each of our tenants.

Tampere Vuokralosäitiö sr was founded in 1970 to meet urgent needs. Agrarian Finland was transforming into an industrial and service society, and migrants were flowing to Tampere seeking industrial work. So new homes were needed, and a lot of them. Suburban areas were built at a brisk pace, and the foundation's first buildings – Multiojankatu 4 and Virontörmänkatu 4 – were also built in these new residential areas.

Now, fifty years later, migration is once again strong, directing residents to three national growth centres: Helsinki, Tampere and Turku. Our goal continues to be to provide high-quality, comfortable and affordable housing to the people of Tampere, while at the same time enabling the city's growth and attractiveness. New VTS-kodit homes will be completed this year, and several buildings will be modernised.

A lot has happened in fifty years. VTS-kodit has grown in importance to both our tenants and the city, as seven per cent of the residents of Tampere already live with us. In the early years, it was important for the tenants to have access to affordable housing, and since then, the significance of tenant democracy, tenant services and living comfort has also become more pronounced. Indeed, we are constantly developing these aspects, listening to our tenants closely.

To celebrate the anniversary of VTS-kodit, we will host a variety of events and competitions, so check out our social media channels on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. First there will be some bus spotting! We have renewed our visual look, which can now be seen on the bus and this magazine, but also in our announcements, on our website and in the stairwells of our buildings. With this fresh, approachable look, we want to communicate what kind of a player VTS-kodit will be in the 2020s.

**Let us have a wonderful anniversary year together!**

**Satu Eskelinen**  
CEO, VTS-kodit



Teemu Jokinen swings in a lighted hammock in a good mood.

## CELEBRATION OF LIGHT IN VIRONTÖRMÄ

**A HAPPY** celebration of light was held in the courtyard of Virontörmänkatu 4, as magnificent light murals were lit up on the walls of the buildings in Virontörmä. This was celebrated with a serving of glogg, Christmas pastries and porridge and a nice time together.

'I have always liked living here and now even more so, as we got some new courtyard lighting and magnificent light murals. I love it when there's light,' says **Birgitta Thomasson**.

**Teemu Jokinen**, who lives at Virontörmänkatu 2, swings in a lighted hammock in a good mood.

'The new lights give a nice amount of light when I come home from practice across the courtyard at evening.'

### Changing images

The colourful images of the light murals are the result of communal work. The residents and day care children of the area got to participate in workshops, where they generated ideas for the images to be projected on the walls of the buildings.



The themes selected were nature, space, cityscape and residents.

The lighting designers made the murals based on the drawings of the residents. The images on the walls of the buildings change, so you will not get bored.

In addition to light murals, Virontörmänkatu 4 has invested in outdoor lighting. Valoa Design,

which executed the murals, also designed the courtyard's atmospheric lighting that does not dazzle the courtyard's users, but rather highlights the buildings, playgrounds and living areas as well as the architecture of the apartment buildings.

### The murals include the street number

**Satu Eskelinen**, CEO of VTS-kodit, is delighted that all the housing companies along the street also joined the lighting project. It was led by Virontörmän Lämpö, which acts as the unifying force in Virontörmä. It also bore the cost of the murals.

'I don't think there's any other residential area with a similar light installation on such a large scale. We can be really proud of this,' Eskelinen says and adds:

'Light installations improve the comfort of the area, but also its safety. The murals include the street number of each building, so it's easy to find your way even in the dark.'



# ALAA WANTED TO BE FINNISH – AND SUCCEEDED!

*Four years ago, a young man from Iraq came to Tampere, having made the firm decision to become one of the Finns.*

**'I WANTED** to learn the language right away so that I could get to know people and the culture through them, and then get a job. I don't think I had any other choice in that situation,' says **Alaa Salonen**, 26.

The asylum seekers' reception centre only organised a short language course, but the eager man independently studied more. Soon the walls of his room were plastered with Finnish words. His good head for languages was helpful, Finnish being already the seventh language he speaks.

Alaa got a job at Kuuselakeskus helping older people. This also gave him the opportunity to build up his vocabulary and practise his language skills.

'The older people were very nice to me. We talked a lot because I wanted to know their stories and they were interested in me and Iraq. These were important discussions.'

Now as his speech is fast and seasoned with humour, listening to it one can only marvel at how fluent, lively and rich his Finnish has become in such a short time.

## **The flea market was surprising**

From the beginning, Alaa wanted to have as much contact with Finnish people as possible.

'I wanted to do what they do, know how it feels and learn to understand them.'



One-year-old Oliver is as energetic and eager to laugh as his father.

So Alaa took a bold leap outside his own culture, went to the sauna naked with other people, worked as Father Christmas and tasted Christmas ham and black sausage. Later, he even went into the delivery room to support his wife giving birth.

It was important for him to get to know not only the Finnish people but also his new hometown. Alaa walked around Tampere, carefully memorised the streets and also visited a flea market on these trips.

'We didn't have those in Iraq. I couldn't wrap my head around

how much stuff there is in Finland and why on earth someone would pay fifty euros for an old plate. Now I can see for myself whether a dish is made by Arabia,' Alaa says with a smile.

He returned to the flea market many times, not because of the dishes though, but because of **Pirjo Salonen**, who worked there as an intern. They immediately got along.

'Alaa made a lasting first impression, as is his way. He is so positive, energetic and forward-looking. Alaa never complains, but rather always finds the best in things and refuses to let negative thoughts rise to the top,' Pirjo describes her husband.

## **The apartment felt like a cramped box**

Pirjo and Alaa decided to get married after a year of dating.

'I said to Alaa as a joke that he can take my surname. Then we started to think about it more closely and realised that a Finnish surname really makes it easier to get a job,' says Pirjo Salonen.

Thus, Alaa became a Salonen, and **Oliver's** father a year later. The family also includes Pirjo's school-aged son. Their home is in a VTS-kodit building in Vuores.

'I love the tranquillity and architecture of Vuores, but this apartment felt really small at first. In Iraq, I was used to everyone having a detached house, big rooms and



## **Multicultural tenant evening coming up**

**ALAA** is trained as an expert by experience at TAMK and volunteers to help other immigrants integrate. He is actively involved in Kototori's activities, which are discussed in more detail on the following spread.

'At Kototori, I have been able to network and get to know a lot of people. It's great to be able to talk about my own experiences as an expert by experience,' says Alaa.

'New immigrants need moti-

vation and someone in the same situation who, by their example, shows that they can learn the language and get a job in Finland. I always tell everyone that getting an education is definitely worth it; it helps to move forward. I myself study programming for the future in my spare time.'

VTS-kodit has started a partnership with Kototori, and their first undertaking together is a multicultural tenant evening. It will give

tenants with an immigrant background a chance to get their voices and ideas heard, as interpretation is provided.

The purpose is to inspire VTS-kodit's tenants from different cultures to work together and develop forms of tenant activity that are easy to get into even for people with an immigrant background.

Continues on page 6 ►



English has remained the home language of Pirjo and Alaa, since they used that language to get to know each other after Alaa came to Finland. To Oliver, they speak Finnish and Arabic.



lots of space. After coming here, I was baffled by what a box I had come into,' Alaa laughs.

He found it difficult to believe that the door did not need to be locked from the inside and that the lock could be trusted. At

night, he was immediately startled awake if someone walked in the stairwell. His feeling of insecurity is understandable, as ISIS had destroyed his family home and the four brothers were in constant danger as the terrorist organisati-

on wanted them in their ranks. In the end, they had to leave to seek asylum.

'Here in Vuores, I gradually began to believe that home is a safe place in Finland. I have changed a lot during these years and now I feel safe. It feels great!'

### The neighbours are great!

Alaa says his neighbours are absolutely great.

'In Iraq, neighbour relationships are important, and people keep a good relationship with their neighbours. It goes without saying that you help them, and even food is shared with neighbours. That's

why it seems strange that here I don't know all the people living in the same stairwell. But this is a nice building, and we have really good neighbours. For example, **Marianne** takes care of Oliver and **Jouni** comes to drill if we need a hole in the wall. We barbecue with other tenants in the yard in the summer and always say hello when we see each other.'

Alaa works as a personal assistant and has also made friends with many of his clients. The sociable man has succeeded in overcoming prejudices many times, with his humour and excellent cooking skills if nothing else.

'I think a person with a negative attitude doesn't know me yet, so

I give them time to get to know me, and maybe they'll change their mind. Of course, it doesn't work every time, but often it does.'

'For example, my blind client **Tommi** was prejudiced against foreign assistants. Gradually we became friends as I encouraged him to get out of bed, came up with nice things to do and created positive energy. We had so much fun that we made a stand-up show called Sokko & mamu about our everyday life. In the show, we tease each other and make comedy about each other's culture. We have performed in Provinssirock, among others.'

## KOTOTORI GIVES ADVICE TO IMMIGRANTS

**KOTOTORI** is a low-threshold guidance and counselling centre for immigrants and native Finns in Hervanta. There you can expand your social network and get help in learning Finnish and improving your employment opportunities, for example.

The main purpose of the activity is to support visitors' autonomy and independent life in Finnish society. If anything comes up that raises questions, you can go to Kototori for advice.

The idea is that the customer gets all the service they need from the same place easily without an appointment, and often in their own language. Counselling is provided in Finnish,

English, Arabic, Persian, Somali and Russian.

'For example, an immigrant tenant of VTS-kodit might want to come here if they have a question about housing but no common language with the landlord. We are in contact with the VTS-kodit housing advice service and can help with issues such as confusion with rent payments,' says Joonas Kiviranta, senior instructor at the immigrant services unit of the City of Tampere.

### Bursting bubbles

Kototori started its activity as part of the TEKO project. Its operating model was born out of the coura-

**Kototori is open  
Tuesdays and  
Fridays  
from 10am to 4pm  
at Hervanta  
Leisure Centre at  
Lindforsinkatu 5.**

ge to look for and try new solutions to promote integration. The end result was awarded last year as the best new social services practice in Finland.

'The core of our activities is to get people to meet, talk to each other and learn about each other's cultures. We want to burst the bubbles, get different groups to work with each other and increase understanding on all sides,' says community work expert Aku Hakulinen.

'Kototori has become the headquarters for community activities, with immigrants and native Finns visiting from all over Tampere. We offer advice, but we also organise sports activities and celebrations

as well as various events and training courses. From here, we also go out to the community to do outreach work.'

Hakulinen works at the social responsibility unit of the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Parishes in Tampere and works in close cooperation with Joonas Kiviranta and the deacon of Hervanta Church in Kototori. In addition to the City and the parish, Kototori's activities include residents, experts by experience, volunteers and other third sector operators – and now also VTS-kodit. The aim is for the whole community to participate in the integration of newcomers.

## Rents, rates and fees in 2020

**THE RENT** level of VTS-kodit apartments remains more than ten per cent below that of privately financed rental apartments, even though there is more new construction and renovation of old than before. The City of Tampere has set an annual target of 222 new apartments. In renovations, particular emphasis is placed on the comfort renovations of properties, the purpose of which is to extend residence times.

The average rent at VTS-kodit this year is €11.60/m<sup>2</sup>/month. The price includes the advance water charge. Last year, the average rent was €11.47/m<sup>2</sup>/month.

The average rent increases for 2020 are 1.42 per cent for Tampereen Vuokratalosäätiö sr's apartments and 1.05 per cent for Vilusen Rinne Oy's apartments (in non-modernised buildings). Rent increases vary by property and are affected by occupancy rate, comfort and demand for the apartments.

In apartments with water metering, the price of hot water will increase to €11.45 per cubic metre (last year €11.20). Cold water costs €3.71 per cubic metre this year (last year €3.64). The monthly fees for covered parking spaces increased by one euro, now starting at 24 euros per month. The price for booking a sauna and the advance water charge remained the same.

Service prices increased again this year, including cleaning and property maintenance (2.1 per cent) and waste management (1.5–2 per cent). Heating and water are also more expensive than before, but efforts are made to influence the costs through saving investments when possible. The electricity contract expired, and the new one-year fixed-term contract raised the price of energy by about 20 per cent due to the high market price of electricity. The electricity contract will be tendered out this year.