



BLOCK CARETAKER KIRSI IS READY TO HELP

PAGES 8-9

VTS
KODIT

**Housing is
undergoing
a change**

PAGE 2

**VTS-kodit has
nine community
mediators**

PAGE 4-5

**Fun activities
bring residents
together**

PAGE 6-7

HOUSING IS UNDERGOING A CHANGE



TAMPERE is an attractive place in many respects. Its population will continue to increase at the second fastest rate in Finland, after Helsinki, and Tampere is the most desirable place to live when measured by attractiveness to migrants. In order to retain its attractiveness, however, the city requires affordable housing – and that is our mission. VTS-kodit provides homes for employees in low-income industries as well as several other population groups.

Housing is undergoing a change in many respects. According to forecasts, the number of young people will decrease, while the proportion of people over the age of 65 will increase dramatically by 2060. When it comes to housing, we need to take into account the needs of senior citizens as well as the increase in immigration. Homes also require solutions suitable for remote workers and reconstituted families, and more space is required for waste sorting. VTS-kodit must now consider how we can respond to these and other changes in housing trends. We also want to ensure high-quality housing in the future.

Rental housing has already become more popular than owner-occupied housing. This is contributed to by the fact that a large proportion of new housing built in recent years has ended up in the ownership of buy-to-let landlords, who rent it out. Buy-to-let landlords prefer small apartments because of their better price per square metre and higher

profit. Low interest costs have also led to housing prices increasing. The number of one-room apartments has increased, and their size has decreased to 27.4 square metres on average. VTS-kodit has not gone along with this trend, however, and the average size of our one-room apartments is 33.6 square metres. Although we build larger apartments than others, we try to keep the apartments reasonably priced, so that tenants also have money to cover their other needs.

We also make sure that smaller apartments are designed with a functional floor plan, taking comfort into account. Our balconies are glazed, and our homes come with storage space. We do not assume that everyone living alone wants to live in a one-room apartment. There are many people who want a two-room apartment, and we can meet this demand. Additionally, we make sure that our properties are versatile by not only building one-room apartments but also two- and three-room apartments and larger family apartments, and we never build buildings comprising solely small apartments. This is our way of creating a good community, which is also contributed to by the building's own active tenant committee.

Satu Eskelinen
CEO, VTS-kodit

STRATEGY WORK PROGRESSES SMOOTHLY

GREETINGS, dear readers of Asukasviesti! We are currently preparing a new strategy for VTS-kodit, and our work is progressing smoothly. The focus areas selected for the strategy include things such as sustainability, reasonably-priced housing and ease of living. The latter is linked to the development of digital services, but we will not be forgetting traditional service channels either, of course. Sustainability, on the other hand, involves taking the environment into account by reducing consumption of water and energy, for example. This also allows us to mitigate the continuous increase in housing costs, without compromising on comfort of living.

In September, our board participated in two strategy days together with the extended management team and consultants. We worked actively, and the days were very fruitful. We were happy to notice how committed VTS-kodit employees are to developing their own work in order to continually improve the services provided to tenants. In November, it was the turn of tenant committees' chairs to review the strategy and share their views about it. The next time the board will review what the strategy working group and management team have produced will be in mid-December, and the strategy will be presented to the board for approval towards the end of January.

In issue 1/21 of Asukasviesti, I wrote that I had proposed partial renovations in addition to comp-

lete overhauls, as partial renovations can be carried out without emptying the building of occupants. This matter has now been taken forwards, and partial renovations will be piloted at some sites next year. Tenants will be able to continue living at home during the renovations, but the kitchen, for example, will be out of commission for a week, or two weeks at maximum. This is taken into account by providing rent deductions. I myself feel that such a short period of inconvenience makes more sense than forcing people to move away completely. We will see how successful this new practice is and what kind of feedback we will receive about it. After all, this is always the practice followed in units in housing cooperatives, even if the renovation period is prolonged.

The City of Tampere has started making preparations to divide Vilusen Rinne Oy, which has caused much discussion among the company's tenants. Currently, the matter is still being looked into, and the City will decide on it late next year. In any case, the tenants have no reason for concern, as this arrangement will not cause any significant changes to their lives.

On the week this magazine is published, an evening event will be held at Doghill Fairytale Farm for tenants of VTS-kodit. Have fun! Merry Christmas to you all and Happy New Year 2022!

Pekka Anttila
Chair of the Board



WE ARE CURRENTLY PREPARING A NEW STRATEGY FOR VTS-KODIT"

A good living atmosphere and pleasant community spirit among tenants. This is the aim of VTS-kodit's tenant activities, which help neighbours be on good speaking terms with each other. However, if your relationship with a neighbour hits the rocks, volunteer community mediator Riitta Hellgren (left) and Director of the Community Mediation Centre Pia Slögs encourage you to contact community mediators in good time.

TENANTS living in the same building often have different situations in life, lifestyles and daily rhythms – and a variety of views concerning good manners, what constitutes normal living, and the use of common facilities, for example.

Disagreements over minor everyday situations may be prolonged and escalate into a real dispute. If this happens, the parties concerned should turn to the Community Mediation Centre for help.

"People ask us what they can do if they're bothered by sounds coming from a neighbour's apartment. When we ask whether they've talked about the issue with the neighbour in question, the caller usually answers that they haven't," says Director of the Community Mediation Centre **Pia Slögs**.

"Our primary advice is that you should go and talk to your neighbour, but never in an agitated state of mind or with an aggressive attitude. You should start the conversation by calmly enquiring 'do you have a moment' and continuing with the words 'are you aware' or 'have you considered'."

When the tenants living in the same building are on good speaking terms with each other, it is easier for them to bring up and come to an agreement about a disturbance caused by a neighbour. However, this connection may have been lost.

"A typical consequence of disagree-

reements is that the party affected doesn't talk at all to the person whose behaviour annoys or bemuses them. Instead, they may make completely mistaken assumptions and interpretations about the neighbour's actions."

Here is where mediation can be of great assistance. The idea is for all parties to have an opportunity to calmly share their views about the matter and have their voices heard.

In other words, mediation is utilised when there is a need for reconciliation because of a long-term disagreement between two or more neighbours. However, any disturbance that breaks the rules of the building must always be reported to building management. Then the situation can be addressed with means provided by the Act on Residential Leases.

VTS-kodit has nine community mediators

The Community Mediation Centre has trained nine tenants of VTS-kodit as volunteer community mediators. They are men and women who help settle disagreements arising in the neighbourhood.

"We asked VTS-kodit to partner with us in this project, and they immediately took to the idea. Now tenants of VTS-kodit can ask us to arrange for another tenant to act as a peer mediator," Pia Slögs says.

Community mediators never mediate in their home building,



as it would be difficult for them to be fully impartial there. Mediators serve as working partners and are bound by confidentiality.

How mediation works

If a tenant of VTS-kodit needs mediation, they can contact the Community Mediation Centre or building manager directly if they do

not have their neighbour's contact information. Participation is always voluntary, which is why the mediator first asks all parties involved whether they are willing to participate in the mediation process.

"The process starts with separate discussions, with the mediator talking to each party separately. The parties don't come together until later, provided that everyone agrees to it."

Slögs describes mediators as neutral facilitators of discussion, who do not take a stand against or in favour of either party.

"Mediators approach the situation with an open mind, without prejudices. They help the tenants take turns sharing their views and listening to what the other party has to say. Mediation is also a chance to rectify misconceptions."

"In mediation, the parties are

Community Mediation Centre

- The centre mediates conflicts related to housing, such as issues related to disruptive behaviour, conflicts in the tenant community, cultural differences, or cooperation problems experienced by tenant committees.

- The operations are funded by the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA), and mediation is free of charge.

- Email address: toimisto@naapuruussovittelu.fi

- Phone numbers: 040 835 2994 and 045 208 8049

- Visit the Community Mediation Centre's website: www.naapuruussovittelu.fi/en/home/

In cases in which someone creates a disturbance with their lifestyle within the meaning of the Act on Residential Leases, i.e. breaks the rules of the building, you must submit an announcement of disturbance to VTS-kodit by using the form available at www.vts.fi/asukkaalle/inenglish/ or by emailing isannointi@vts.fi.

considered to be the experts in their own conflict. After all, no one else knows better what they need in order to continue living comfortably. In other words, they're able to influence how the issue is handled and settled."

A written agreement can be drawn up about the settlement, and the tenants can also arrange for the mediator to make a follow-up visit or call.

Community mediators foster peaceful living

RIITTA Hellgren was chosen for mediation training arranged for tenants of VTS-kodit. Now she volunteers as a community mediator.

"It is important to me that everyone can live undisturbed and have peace of mind in their own home. My own residential community is very nice, and I want to help

others be in the same situation."

"Mediation is an excellent way to solve problems. The role of mediators is to establish a safe atmosphere, in which everyone is given the chance to say how they feel about the matter. Simply talking about the matter together and correcting misconceptions is

often enough to ease the situation. We all have a habit of making assumptions about what the other person is thinking, doing or saying – but this is not the truth."

Riitta Hellgren gained good experience of an actual mediation situation that she took part in as the working partner of a profes-

sional from the Community Mediation Centre.

"It was great that the persons involved had the chance to give voice to the thoughts in their heads during the initial discussions held separately. They had to put into words what annoyed them about their neighbours and

then process these thoughts."

"We held a joint mediation discussion a few weeks later, and the situation had already simmered down significantly. Everyone had clearly thought about what they themselves could do to improve the peace in the neighbourhood, and the children also

proposed good ideas. The fact that everyone was there voluntarily contributed to the atmosphere."

"The mediator made a follow-up call and said that the parties to the mediation are now doing better. The tenants have formed a connection and are able to talk to each other."



Kirsi (left) from Ekokumppanit poses with another Kirsi from Ryydynpohja. This is how many ideas for activities were accumulated in just five minutes at the Eco Team kick-off event.

Anne from Tohloppi was one of the people who contributed ideas.



Eco Team activities proposed by tenants

- ▶ trips into nature, such as hiking in forests, going on hikes that include lighting a campfire, and picking berries
- ▶ cleaning up the environment by picking up litter and cigarette butts, combatting invasive alien species
- ▶ urban farming, terrace gardens, building insect hotels
- ▶ providing advice on waste sorting
- ▶ walking dogs together as a group
- ▶ exchanging goods and services, holding yard sales, recycling magazines and newspapers
- ▶ workshops in buildings' common facilities: vegan cooking, food preservation, crafts clubs, etc.
- ▶ bicycle repair and maintenance.



ECO TEAM ACTIVITIES ARE OFF TO AN ENTHUSIASTIC START

VTS-KODIT'S new Eco Team activities are off to an excellent start. In October, a little over twenty enthusiastic and active tenants participated in kick-off training held in Ekokumppanit's premises. Good ideas were thrown around throughout the evening. These types of activities have clearly been much-anticipated.

The Eco Team is a group comprising tenants of VTS-kodit who, together with other tenants, promote a sustainable lifestyle in their residential area and seek to increase team spirit, community spirit and participation.

Eco Team members encourage and guide tenants in ecological matters, brainstorm ideas and carry out activities. By doing so,

they influence the comfort and costs of living.

"Eco Team activities are a new concept that tenants can make their own by coming up with their own ideas. The main thing is for the activities to be beneficial and fun and to make you feel good. The newly created network provides tenants with a wider range of opportunities for participation, activities and meeting other people," says Head of Building Management **Kristian Unkuri**, summarising the idea of Eco Team activities.

"The Eco Team has strength in numbers. When someone comes up with an idea that benefits the environment, these activities also allow the idea to be replicated

and utilised in other properties of VTS-kodit and by all of our 17,000 tenants. Then it really benefits the environment!"

How about going on a trip as a group?

Tenants can carry out Eco Team activities in their own yard and residential area, or they can go on joint trips to learn new things and refresh their mind. The common facilities of VTS-kodit are available for use, and a small budget is also available for purchasing picnic lunches or bike maintenance supplies.

The Eco Team is supported by Ekokumppanit Oy and its Communications Specialist **Kirsi Viertola**, as well as her colleagues. They are

Objectives of Eco Team activities

- ▶ to increase team spirit, community spirit and participation
- ▶ to foster a sustainable lifestyle in the residential area
- ▶ to increase the comfort and attractiveness of the residential area
- ▶ to increase sensible use of energy and waste sorting while simultaneously saving money
- ▶ to spread good practices for the benefit of all tenants
- ▶ to offer low-threshold human activities that everyone can participate in according to their own resources.

inexhaustible sources of ideas.

"We provide suggestions for destinations and tips for organising campaigns and events. For example, guided trips to gather mushrooms, wild herbs or wildflowers with an expert are a fun and interesting thing to do," Kirsi Viertola says.

"We also help Eco Team members make use of various theme days and weeks, such as Finnish Nature Day or Energy Saving Week. Campaign materials and ideas for activities are available for these events."

"It's also a good idea to copy the ideas of other Eco Team members. For example, if a fun event is being held in Hervanta, other Eco Team members can go on a study trip to the event and bring the idea back to their own building or residential area."

Fun activities bring residents together

Eco Team activities will be piloted,

developed and instilled as part of the activities of VTS-kodit throughout 2022. You can join the activities even if you did not attend the kick-off event. Current additional information about the topic will be made available at vts.fi/asukkaalle/inenglish/ along the way.

Eco Team members will be provided with joint team training, and active participation accumulates 'Pisteet kotiin' bonus points, but participation in the Eco Team does not require membership of a tenant committee.

Traditional environmental officer activities will also continue as normal for the time being.

"Everyone can participate in Eco Team activities according to how much free time and energy they have. They are fun, social and voluntary activities that bring tenants together. The aim is not to monitor whether your neighbours sort their waste or whether everyone participates in volunteer work events," Kirsi Viertola emphasises with a smile.



Kirsi Helenius is easy to spot in the yard. "Children playing in the yard often wonder who I am, what I'm doing and why I'm wearing those clothes. I try my best to answer their questions. And tenants who call us at work often only ask for 'the red-headed girl'. My colleagues immediately know who they are talking about," Kirsi laughs.

BLOCK CARETAKER KIRSI IS READY TO HELP

BLOCK caretaker **Kirsi Helenius** of VTS-kodit takes care of properties in Kämenniemi, Peltolampi, Härmälä and Rantaperkiö. Kirsi, who currently works at Kotikatu Kiinteistöpalvelut, was also responsible for buildings of VTS-kodit in her previous job. She also lives in a VTS-kodit apartment herself, so she is familiar with the building and its practices.

"VTS is a good partner; I feel that

our cooperation works really well. I often call the building managers, for example, and they always provide me with a friendly service."

Kirsi herself wants to serve her customers as well as possible. Greeting tenants whom she happens to meet in the yard with a smile on her face is a matter of course for this service industry veteran.

"I've worked service jobs all my

life at stores and bars, for example. You certainly can't call me a quiet person, as I like talking with tenants."

Changing careers was worth it

Kirsi picked up a new profession six years ago.

"When I went on maternity leave, I wanted to switch to a day job, and

as I've always been a person who gets things done, property maintenance seemed like a nice option. It proved to be a good decision. I like the fact that no two days are ever the same."

She has completed an initial and further vocational qualification in facilities services at Tampere Adult Education Centre (TAKK).

"From the start of our studies, we spent two days a week interning, so I got to experience practical work immediately. It was a very good system."

Kirsi Helenius points out that a caretaker must, of course, also have other skills besides the technical skills gained from school.

"Although buildings today are equipped with a great deal of new technology that you have to be familiar with, the most important skills in this profession are still common sense and a customer-oriented approach. You can get far with those."

Called up to work at short notice

VTS-kodit's block caretakers are responsible for both yards and buildings. There is always much to do. For example, right before the interview Kirsi Helenius plugged a dishwasher in one apartment, changed the tap seals in another one, and replaced a drain trap and drain pipe in a third apartment.

"I carry out the work in order of urgency, but some jobs require me to leave as soon as I get the call. For example, I have to react fast if someone's heating isn't working



The routines for the last weekday of the month include gathering consumption figures for every property. Kirsi Helenius uploads the information on district heat, water and electricity directly to online software from her mobile phone.

and it's freezing outside. And I recently got a call during heavy rains about a flooded parking place."

Invitation to coffee came as a happy surprise

Kirsi Helenius's most recent site is Tuomikuja 3, which she has only been taking care of for a few months.

"The tenant committee's chair immediately invited me for a quick cup of coffee so that I could get to know the tenants. It was a nice way to get to know people, I really liked it. I talked with the tenants, who told me about their wishes, and we were immediately able get

each other up to speed."

"Tenants are welcome to come up to me in the yard if they have something they want to talk about, and many have done so. I usually have time to exchange a few words."

"Of course, sometimes I'm busy – yesterday, for example, I received a total of 34 calls. And last winter it snowed so much that every time I finished my snowploughing rounds, there was enough snow on the ground to start all over again. I clear snow manually in places that a machine can't reach, which is physically strenuous. But I like to think of this way: there's no need to go to the gym if you spend the day shovelling snow!"

Report problems to maintenance services immediately

KIRSI Helenius urges tenants to contact maintenance services immediately if they have questions about something concerning the property.

"There's no sense in ruminating

over something alone. Don't hesitate to call us or submit a fault notification, even if you're unsure whether the matter in question falls under the caretaker's responsibility."

"Problems with drainage in particular should always be reported too soon rather than a moment too late. We can fix the problem faster and without water damage if we are able to get to



work while water is still getting through and the drain isn't completely blocked."

"Tenants should in general pay close attention to everything involving water. After all, it can cause a

lot of damage in a short period of time," the caretaker points out.