

Green Care Organization and Certification in Finland

Martta Ylilauri, Project Manager, MSc (Agriculture and Forestry), Levón Institute, University of Vaasa, Finland

In Finland, the broadest possible selection of nature-based activities has been gathered together under the umbrella of Green Care concept.

The association, Green Care Finland, was established in 2010 for coordination and development of overall professions that are using nature in the field of social-, health-, education- and recreation services. The national association contributes to the interdisciplinary networking of professionals, spreads information and leads the Green Care quality management work. Currently, the association has a diverse network of actors both nationally and professionally with over 250 members (e.g. entrepreneurs and other service producers, developers, researchers and educators), and it is growing steadily as the interest for nature-based activities is increasing.

Green Care Finland contributes to arranging the annual national Green Care Conference in Finland and is upholding the national websites (www.gcfinland.fi), which both have a significant role in networking and distribution of information. The development of Finnish Green Care concept and activities is also promoted via national and regional projects. There are presently over 30 regional Green Care projects, as well as several project initiatives in regional, national and international level. The National Green Care coordination project (2015–2017) has been established to contribute the co-operation of these projects in a national level by sharing information, arranging networking and theme events, as well as to create a Green Care web portal and contribute to the Green Care quality management process.

Recently, a large consortium of Finnish universities of applied sciences has developed a complementary multidisciplinary Green Care education module. This has been essential, as the nature-based methodologies and approaches are mostly missing in current degrees of social and health care. In the same time a corresponding education module in Swedish Ostrobothnia, "*Utbildningsmodul inom naturbaserad vård och pedagogik*", has been developed by a regional project consortium.

Finnish Green Care quality management work was launched in 2012 when the Green Care Code of Ethics was established. Quality management work continued with designing the quality models in a cooperation with Green Care Finland, National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) and Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke). The Finnish Green Care concept got divided in two sections: NatureCare services (*LuontoHoiva, GrönOmsorg*) and NatureEmpowerment services (*LuontoVoima, GrönKraft*), which differs from each other by criteria, directional legislation and clients' position.

NatureCare resides with the social and health care services in which the public sector has the responsibility of providing the services. NatureCare services are primarily intended for people in a vulnerable position, who need care or external support with physical or mental health issues, long-term unemployment, substance abuse or similar challenges. NatureCare service provider must have an education in social services or health care or cooperation with social or health care professionals. The activities must comply with any relevant social service and health care legislation and regulations. A safety plan as well as a self-monitoring plan is required for all NatureCare services.

NatureEmpowerment services include goal-oriented services in nature-assisted well-being, education and recreation services. These services are available to the public and aim to promote the overall well-being and health of the participants. The service provider does not need qualifications in social services or health care, but the operations must comply with any valid recommendations and regulations in the field of the service provider. The expertise is required by the services and the Green Care operating method and each service must be provided in a professional, goal-oriented and responsible manner. A safety plan that covers all safety issues pertaining to the service is always required.

Green Care Quality Certificate was published in January 2017 and several applications have already been processed. The Green Care Quality Manual serves as one of the main documents when applying for Green Care quality label, but it can also be used as a quality management tool even without applying for a certificate.

In conclusion, creating a multidisciplinary and –professional concept of Finnish Green Care have contributed to the creation of innovation-oriented discussion forum, that is likely to provide refreshing and empowering viewpoints for plenty of professionals. However, this kind of broadness can also be seen as confusing and frustrating. Therefore, it is also essential to develop specific methodologies as well as the quality models, that guides the practical actions of a professional.



References:

Green Care Finland's homepage: www.gcf Finland.fi

Green Care Quality Manual:

<http://www.gcf Finland.fi/in-english/green-care-quality-manual/>