



FOREST-BASED CARE

case study

METSÄMIELI

Metsämieli or Forestmind, as we use to say in English, is a program of exercises of mind skills designed to utilize and intensify the natural healing effects of forests and is ideal for promoting self-awareness, relaxation, stress relief, refreshment, and invigoration. The method uses psychology, mindfulness and life coaching, in a natural setting or with natural imagery.

“The impact of Metsämieli (Forestmind) methodology cannot be captured by quantifying it, the impact is about making a difference in the lives of individuals, like when they come back with gratitude and tears in their eyes. It is when you help families re-connect and depressed youth gain will to go on, simply thanks to spending time in nature and making it a life-style. That kind of impact has more value for us”

Sirpa Arvonen

MODEL IN A NUTSHELL

- **Website**
metsamieli.fi/Etusivu
- **Social channels**
facebook.com/Metsamielimenetelma
instagram.com/metsamielimenetelma
- **Country**
Finland
- **Contact us through Alliance**
greenforcare.eu/joining4c/metsamieli-forestmind/
- **Main sector**
Private and voluntary
- **Specific sector**
Education,
Social care,
Tourism,
Corporate well-being
- **Stage of development**
Project
- **Our work in SDGs**



Forest Mind

FROM FEW TO MANY

My name is Sirpa Arvonen, the founder of the initiative. I have a background in Behavioural Science. Before starting Forestmind I worked with associations, health related exercise campaigns in nature and outdoors and with company wellbeing programs. As I preferred outdoors and nature as a venue for seminars and meetings, I also soon developed a **methodology designed specifically for organizing outdoor events**. Back then I was also suffering from a severe **chronical illness**. During that period, I had the time to write down my own experience and **publish it as a book, on how to utilize the well-being effects of nature**. The book was more about testament about life and nature. I received a lot of requests from readers to develop a more tangible methodology based on the ideas mentioned in the book. The book was aimed for self-care, however, later on was developed into an educational program for instructors and professionals who could use it in their work.

My initial idea was to **help families to re-connect with each-other and with nature**, to fight depression in young ages that is wide-spread in Finland, to bring back human-nature interaction to everyday lives and to urban lifestyle. At the moment, the methodology is being used by qualified instructors based on their own activities and target groups, i.e people with mental and psychological difficulties, for engagement and involvement of youth and elderly.



FROM IDEA TO ACTION

Having worked with associations, health related exercise campaigns in nature and outdoors and with company wellbeing programs and having suffered myself from a chronic illness, the concept came to me from putting my background, experience, listening to people and love for nature and **showing people with health problems how nature can help**.

The theoretical background of Metsämieli / Forestmind is based on the effects of nature for health and well-being. It is also focused on growing evidence. The building blocks of the methodology are

- Around **150 different nature exercises**, recommendations on how much you should walk and stay in nature regularly;
- Social psychology**- using the group dynamics and the social elements of well (i.e. being important for and heard by other people).
- Behavioural science- Positive psychology**- what kind of inner discussions and dilemmas you have and how to understand how they affect your daily life. Through this Metsämieli instructors are holding space and facilitating the moments and discussions in nature.

Metsämieli is a brand. The network of around **500 professionals** entitled to use the brand and methodology for their own work is spreading it all over Finland and beyond. It is also on a voluntary basis, those who would like to participate in the courses pay a small fee.

Main activities of the initiative include:

- **Trainings of the method** for trainers, instructors and guides
- **Educational activities** in collaboration with educational institutions in Finland
- Metsämieli **practices** for participants of the courses

Our impacts can refer to number of participants in the courses, the number of Metsämieli trainers and courses themselves and the power and reach of the network. In nearly **8 years**, the Metsämieli methodology was covered in **over 1000 courses**, educators and professionals have added new aspects to the methodology while teaching and using it. So, the methodology is always evolving, and co-created through its application.

FROM OLD TO NEW

The difference is in the **simplicity of the methodology**. It is based on a simple framework that is easy to follow and scale up. I didn't intend it as a business first. It is combining **science-based research** about the wellbeing effects of the nature with **the mind skills**, and has elements from neuro-linguistic programming, psychological theories and mindfulness. Metsämieli activities use nature nearby - parks, forests; it is about where you feel in peace and safe. The idea is to **make access to nature easier**.

FROM NOW TO THEN

Metsämieli looks forward to scaling up its impact within Finland but also **internationally starting** from the next year. The aim is to hold **workshops and trainings** in the countries like Norway, Sweden, Netherlands, Czech Republic and Belgium. Externally, climate change, human-nature relations and the global pandemic are the major challenges at the moment. While internally Metsämieli would benefit a lot from human resources (people with experience and educational background to invest their time to develop the method further), time and investment for promotion and marketing, and also reliable funding for organizing the workshops abroad.

