

Sustainable care design for individuals on the autism spectrum



PROJECT:
Autism Foundation Finland, Villa Särkiniemi



COMPANY:
Northern Horizon



LOCATION
Kuopio, Finland

Challenge

Diagnoses of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Finland have risen significantly in recent decades. According to the Finnish Autism Society, approximately 55,000 individuals, corresponding to about 1% of the population, currently live with ASD. For individuals on the autism spectrum, the physical environment plays a critical role in wellbeing: sensory overstimulation, poor acoustics and inadequate spatial design can significantly affect quality of life and the effectiveness of care.

Autism Foundation Finland (Autismisäätiö) is a non-profit foundation in Finland, founded by relatives of people on the autism spectrum, aiming to support individuals living with ASD. Operating across 30 locations in Finland, the foundation provides guidance and coaching services for employment and education, around-the-clock and supported housing, as well as housing skills training. Profits from operations are reinvested directly into improving the quality of care provided.

Solution

Villa Särkiniemi is a care home designed specifically to meet the unique needs of young people and adults on the autism spectrum. Operated by Autism Foundation Finland, the facility offers 24-hour living and supported living services for 34 residents across two residential buildings and a smaller administration building, totalling approximately 2,000 sqm. It is located on the lakeside of Kuopio, the largest city in Eastern Finland.

The care home was developed and constructed by Hoivarakentajat, a Finnish company specialising in energy-efficient buildings constructed from domestic logs, including care homes and kindergartens. Villa Särkiniemi was the second care home built in a long-term partnership between Hoivarakentajat and Autism Foundation Finland, designed by architect Anssi Kankkunen. Northern Horizon acquired the asset during the construction phase as the long-term building owner.



To ensure the unique needs of residents were prioritised from the outset, staff members and residents were actively involved in the planning process — giving residents a rare opportunity to shape their own living environment.

The design process required expertise across various fields, including sustainable construction, energy efficiency, room layout, lighting and acoustics.

Results

Villa Särkiniemi opened in March 2024. The buildings achieved EPC rating B and are aligned with EU Taxonomy objective 7.7 (Acquisition and ownership of buildings). Villa Särkiniemi holds both LEED and BREEAM Excellent certifications, reflecting the high sustainability standards embedded from the design stage.

Outcomes

The 24-hour serviced apartments are located in a single-storey, fan-shaped building overlooking the lake. To ensure a calm and safe environment for the residents, the building is divided into three smaller units, each with a separate entrance and its own shared living room.

The supported living apartments are located in a separate two-storey loft building, where residents live independently with support as needed.

The two buildings are connected via a common courtyard, designed to maximise outdoor space. A large terrace, walking paths, seating areas and flowerbeds support the therapeutic benefits of time spent outdoors.

The buildings are constructed from domestic wood, a sustainable choice that also reduces echo and minimises sensory overstimulation. Wooden structural elements on the façade continue through to the interior of the apartments.

Natural light is maximised throughout. Living and common areas use neutral colours, minimalist furniture and carefully selected materials to create a functional, low-stimulation environment.

Indoor climate is maintained through geothermal heating and cooling, supplemented by rooftop solar panels. In 2025, the 40 solar panels installed on the rooftop produced a total of 12,362 kWh.

Source: Autismisäätiö, Autism Foundation Finland



Our mission is to offer each resident exactly what suits them – an everyday life that is their own, yet still familiar.

Mission statement
Autismisäätiö, Autism Foundation Finland



Source: Northern Horizon

Northern Horizon

Northern Horizon is committed to helping alleviate the structural undersupply of modern care beds in the Nordics through investments in healthcare and social infrastructure real estate. With 180+ investments for its managed funds since 2007, Northern Horizon has established itself as the leading specialized social infrastructure asset manager in the region. Northern Horizon's two active funds in the social infrastructure space, ACIV and ACSIF, target new, fit-for-purpose care facilities as well as forward purchase/forward-funding projects in urban areas with a growing elderly population and a sustained demand for high-quality facilities.