PRESS RELEASE: Winners of the 45th Oulu International Children's and Youth Film Festival 2026

For immediate release

Children's Film Competition
The Oulu Energy Children's Film Competition award for the director of the film selected by the children's jury: Norbert Lechner
Film: THE SECRET FLOOR

Honorable Mention:
Director: Krzysztof Komander
Film: PIXIE: THE NEW BEGINNING

FInnish Competition
The Church Media Foundation's "Look at Me..." award for director: Malin Nyqvist
Film: GAP

Youth Film Competition
The 4H Association of Oulu's Global Future Prize for the film selected byt the youth jury: SKIFF
Directed by: Cecilia Verheyden

Honorable Mention:
Film: NIÑXS
Directed by: Kani Lapuerta

ECFA- Award for Best European Children's Film
Film selected by the international jury: THE SECRET FLOOR
Directed by: Norbert Lechner

ECFA- Short Film Award for Best European Children's short film
Film selected by the international jury: WHEN I GET RICH
Directed by: Lucas Camps

A BETTER WORLD AWARD
Media educator Jukka Haveri

CHILDREN'S FILM COMPETITION AWARD:

The children's jury presented the Children's Film Competition award—donated by Oulun Energia and consisting of 2,000 euros—to the director of the best film in the competition. This year's children's jury included Eppu Jylhä, Luna Jänkälä, Joakim Mikkonen from Myllytulli School, Ritva Laitila, Nikolas Pohjanrinne, Iina Posio, Ellen Riekki, and Salli Rintala from Teuvo Pakkala School, as well as Sonja Gera, Aura Ketola, Valto Sailio, and Adele Sevander from the Oulu Steiner School.

The winner is German director **Norbert Lechner** for his film **THE SECRET FLOOR.**

Children's Jury: *"The parents of Karli, the story's main character, have bought an old hotel, and the plot moves back and forth between the 1930s and the present day via the hotel's elevator. The suspense is maintained*

throughout the film and is sustained by interesting cinematographic techniques. The intriguing setting of the secret top floor, along with the actions, mannerisms, clothing, and speech patterns of the skilled characters, evoke a bygone era. The main character, Karli, along with his new friends Hannah and George, begin to unravel the mystery. It's sad that the story is based on real historical events, even though that's what makes the film so compelling. What's frightening is that similar things are still happening today, which is why it's important to address them in children's movies. Here, it's been done in an interesting and fresh way."

Director Norbert Lechner: *"Thank you for this wonderful award! I accept this award and would like to speak about the connection between Finland and Germany. I come from a Boy Scouts background, and at the Scout camps of my youth, we used yurts similar to the ones you use here in Lapland. There, we spent time together and formed friendships. The Secret Floor also speaks to this sense of togetherness and connection. So I thank Finland for this great gift."*

Honorable Mention:

The Children's Jury awarded an honorable mention to director **Krzysztof Komander** for his Polish-Czech film **PIXIE: THE NEW BEGINNING**. *"The film addresses a topic with which many can relate: bullying. For the main character, Hania, the situation is complicated by her mother's death, a move to a new environment without friends, and a strong belief in the pixies her mother told her about. The story is relatable and, in its own way, highlights the dangers of bullying and the importance of being able to apologize and learn to accept differences."*

Director Krysztof Komander's message to the festival: *"I would like to sincerely thank the festival, the jury, and the audience for this wonderful recognition. It means a lot to me and our entire crew, especially because this film was created by a group of debutants. It is not only my feature debut, but also the debut of our producer, cinematographer, production designer, first assistant director, and all the young actors you see on screen. We are also extremely happy to see that our story resonates with audiences internationally. It means so much to us to know that the emotions, characters, and themes of our film can be understood and appreciated by people from different countries and cultures. Once again, thank you to the festival and the jury for this wonderful honor. We are truly happy, proud, and grateful. Kiitos!"*

THE CHURCH MEDIA FOUNDATION'S "LOOK AT ME..." AWARD: GAP

The Media Foundation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland awards the 1,500-euro "Look at Me..." Award to the director of a feature-length or short film for children or young people in the festival's Domestic Competition. **Juha Rajamäki**, who has had a long career in church communications and is one of the founders of the Church Media Foundation, selected **Malin Nyqvist's** short film **GAP** as the winner.

Judge: *"Despite its short format, 'GAP' addresses the current challenges faced by many children and young people, particularly in the context of social media. It shows how communicating through various apps creates pressure to project an image of oneself that doesn't necessarily correspond to reality but rather forces one to construct a self-image that desperately seeks the approval of others. When the film's main characters are able to acknowledge their own imperfections and shatter the illusion they have sought to create of themselves in their interactions with one another—and to forgive one another— they find a connection that frees them to be exactly who they are and to accept one another—even with those flaws they would rather not admit to the other.*"

Director Malin Nyqvist: *"Thank you very much for the award. Remember, social media isn't dangerous, but the people in it may be. Do also remember meeting people IRL."*

GLOBAL FUTURE PRIZE: SKIFF

The Global Future Award, presented by the Oulu 4H Association, was given to the best youth film at the festival. The jury consisted of Berliners Lotte Dorner, Konstantin Marx, and Emilia Pegler, as well as local media students Benjamin Härkönen, Milla Lyytinen, Kaisla Pitkälä, and Caroliina Tennivaara. The winner is **Skiff**, a Belgian, Dutch, and Swedish co-production directed by **Cecilia Verheyden**.

Youth Film Jury: *"This year's winning film offers an unprecedented portrayal of a young person's search for identity. It follows a cry for a sense of belonging across moral boundaries and brings it to life in a visually stunning way. The protagonist's driving force and passion—her hobby—allows the viewer to get close to her inner world. Realistic sibling relationships, great music, and stunning cinematography build a story that you can truly immerse yourself in and feel seen within."*

Director Cecilia Verheyden: *"Thank you so very much. We are truly honored and extremely happy. I hope this award helps the film reach an even wider audience. I believe it's important to tell stories about young people who are searching for their own identities. We live in a time when there's less and less space for stories like this, especially for queer people. I hope that young people who watch the film will see themselves in the characters or recognize a friend or classmate, and that it will help them understand themselves and the people around them a little better. I'd also like to give a special thanks to Femke van Hove, who plays our main character, Malou. She carried the film on her young shoulders and did a wonderful job. Thank you once again."*

Honorable Mention:

The Youth Jury awarded an honorable mention to the Mexican-German film **NIÑXS**, directed by **Kani Lapuerta**. *"The festival featured stories that challenged gender norms. This resonated deeply with the entire jury. It was inspiring to hear a young woman describe her journey through this maze. The cinematography, humor, and fascinating autobiographical elements—both of the protagonist and the director—captivated us. Seeing their shared growth through hope, love, and arguments with their parents over the course of more than eight years—this was a positive story that left us with a warm sense of togetherness."*

ECFA AWARD: THE SECRET FLOOR

ECFA (European Children's Film Association) is a European organization dedicated to children's films. A three-member international jury presented the award for the best European children's film. The jury consisted of **Eva-Maria Schneider-Reuter**, a Berlin-based expert in film education; **Sunniva Eir Tangvik Kveum**, a Norwegian-Swedish filmmaker and director of the film **Nipster**; and **Tiia Hyvälä**, a film and early childhood education professional from Oulu.

The winner is the German film **THE SECRET FLOOR**, directed by **Norbert Lechner.**

The jury: *"Some stories are greater than human life itself. They must be told again and again so that we never forget their lessons—especially in today's divided world. The film offers a touch of cinematic magic, a dash of a gripping mystery, and plenty of superb performances by young actors.*

The film takes us on an adventure in which a darker reality is gradually revealed. It masterfully combines entertainment for the whole family with the weight of history, skillfully highlighting a difficult chapter in our past without ever sounding preachy. At the heart of the film is a moving story of friendship, in which children show how differences can be set aside to achieve more important goals.

Although the film subtly reflects the troubling trends of our own time, it leaves us with hope. For sometimes, characters from the past come to remind us of the courage required to perform acts both great and small, and to defend our humanity—things that must not be consigned to history."

Director Norbert Lechner: *"When we started making this film six years ago, we didn't think the film would be so timely. Anti-Semitism is on the rise again, and I'm often worried that this kind of politics is gaining a foothold in Europe. In this day and age, we need films that offer hope. I am deeply grateful for this award."*

ECFA Short Film Award: WHEN I GET RICH

A three-member international jury also presented an award for the best European children's short film.

The winner is the Dutch film **WHEN I GET RICH**, directed by **Lucas Camps.**

Jury: *"The film combines the boundless imagination of childhood with the magic of filmmaking. At the same time, it reminds us that we can approach unfamiliar and new things with curiosity.*

The jury was impressed by the film's lead actors, whose natural and effortless performances bring an authentic sense of play to the screen. The director has succeeded in creating a space where children's imaginations can develop freely, and every moment feels genuine and spontaneous.

With its playful cinematic language, the short film speaks to its youngest audience without patronizing them. It makes the viewer smile, even though the themes it addresses feel particularly relevant in today's divided world.

This film reminds us that each of us has something valuable in our own lives that someone else desires—and that friendship can blossom when we open up our worlds to one another. Because sometimes it's precisely the things that set us apart that can bring us together."

Director Lucas Camps' message to the festival: *"It is an honor and a privilege to win the ECFA Short Film Award at your wonderful festival. I made this film to show that children and adults can value things very differently. What is 'wealth' from a child's perspective? I would like to thank the jury for recognizing all the effort that went into making this film, and I hope that it will continue to reach new audiences around the world."*

A BETTER WORLD AWARD

The award is presented to an individual, group, organization, or even a working group that has made significant contributions to the field of children's and youth film. This year, A Better World Award is presented to media educator **Jukka Haveri** for his decades of valuable work in promoting film education in Finland among children, youth, and adults alike.

Jukka Haveri's message to the festival: *"My work would not have been possible without the interest and enthusiasm of hundreds of teachers—and, of course, thousands of students—in the subject at hand: audiovisual media, both as a learning tool and as a subject of study. I see myself more as a facilitator of learning than as a teacher, by providing space for students to express their own voices in media workshops. Nor would this work have been possible without the trust my employer placed in the value and significance of this work, enabling the regular implementation of media workshops that foster activity, creative production, and critical thinking. The students' own observations lay the foundation for insights. The hands-on nature of media workshops develops sustainable skills—such as initiative, the ability to interact, and decision-making—that will not be lost amid technological changes. In these uncertain times, I would encourage educators to*

empower students to take on the role of active citizens, rather than—as is often the case—merely that of consumers of services (including digital ones). Students' voices are needed to build a better and more democratic future."

The 46th Oulu International Children's and Youth Film Festival will be held November 9–15, 2026.

Photos of the winning films and directors are available on the festival's website:
https://www.oulufilmfestival.fi/en/news-winners-2026/

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