

MENTORING STORIES

Mentoring Migrants on the Upper Secondary Level Education

Project Pilot No. 2



Description of the project

Mentoring Migrants in the Upper Secondary Level Education – MentoMigri is a project coordinated by Jyväskylä Educational Consortium Gradia in Finland. Gradia provides both upper secondary general (GE) and vocational (VET) education.

MentoMigri aims at improving integration of migrants in educational services. This is done by coaching students in upper secondary level education to be mentors for migrants. At the same time, the growth of knowledge and skills of native students is promoted as well as the two-way integration.

The national project partners are JAMK Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences, Jyväskylä College of Services and Karstula Evangelical College, all located in the Central Finland Region. The added value of the TCA (with Belgium, Germany and Sweden) for MentoMigri comes within transnational research, experience and different mentoring methods tested in the partner countries. As the main project outcomes, the mentoring model for migrants and the coaching model for the mentors-to-be are developed and piloted three times. The models will be part of the activities in the organisations involved and they will be disseminated by the national and international partners.

Mentoring Stories

Jyväskylä Educational Consortium Gradia piloted a different way to achieve guidance and multicultural skills for the students of Learning Support in Schools and Instruction of Morning and Afternoon Activities, Social and Health Care (e.g. Practical Nurses), Youth and Leisure Time Instruction in autumn 2018. They acted as mentors for migrant students as a part of the action model of the Project MentoMigri. It included a two-day coaching in mentoring and multiculturalism for mentors, and a mentoring process that ended in December 2018. Mentors and mentees from Jyväskylä College of Services and Karstula Evangelical College were part of the pilot, too. In this leaflet you can find attendees' stories on mentoring.

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Leverage from
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Mentors' Stories

JONI'S MENTORING STORY

Joni, 36 years, has changed his job. He was formerly a constructor and welder but wanted to find something different. He now studies to be a Youth and Community Instructor at Gradia Jämsä. It will not be his final qualification since he plans to continue his studies later at Humak University of Applied Sciences to gain the Bachelor's Degree in Community Education. At the moment, Joni attends an on-the-job learning period and works as a volunteer at a Youth Club with a lot of migrant clients.

Joni already had some experience in guiding migrants prior to the mentoring process. He has been coaching a football team about a year including both Finns and migrants. Nevertheless, it was obvious to him to commit himself into mentoring. *"In working life, you will need more and more multicultural skills and competencies. I am sure I will need this kind of experience in my future jobs. So, this is part of my professional development"*, Joni says. He was not able to set any special expectations for these activities. He was encouraged to participate in the training by his mates at the work placement.

The actual mentoring started with a meeting in which Joni was supposed to meet his mentee for the first time. However, he did not turn up and Joni had to catch him later. He felt excited but the contact was successful and they easily started to discuss many things. Time to time, there was a small language barrier and the mentee did not always tell Joni if he had not understood everything. It was sorted out, though.

Mentors were trained prior to the commencement of the mentoring process. The contents and themes of the training program were important but there was a lot to learn in a short period of time. The process lasted the whole autumn term and it was nice according to Joni. *"This kind of a process opens your eyes and makes you think. Prejudices and stereotypes have disappeared. Without this contact with somebody from so far, it would be difficult to imagine how different the living conditions can be. There might not have been education opportunities available but one has had to start working as a child without a possibility to be a child"*, Joni says.

Joni had no major difficulties in mentoring. There was help and support available for working as a mentor. Once, Joni asked for advice from his trainer. Mentoring activities did not demand too much extra time since Joni was able to combine mentoring with his on-the-job learning activities. He used ca. 1 to 2 hours weekly. Mentor training fits perfectly to his studies in the field of education and instruction, he estimates.

According to Joni, these kinds of matters should absolutely be included in the field of education and instruction as well as in social and health care as multiculturalism is present everywhere in the future working life.

Joni's mentee was a youngster who wanted to talk, for instance, about the choices he had made concerning his studies. Joni felt that he was able to give him advice and answers as well as life experience. Joni, himself, gained new insight into people with different backgrounds. He very concretely also realized how well things are in Finland.

Joni wants to encourage future mentors to bravely get involved in mentoring and multicultural contacts. It is not too demanding and one can achieve valuable things to be later used professionally. Professional development is the most important answer to the question why one should become a mentor.

VALENTINA'S MENTORING STORY

Students of Karstula Evangelical College attended the mentoring process already the second time but, this time, they had an opportunity to become mentors, themselves. Valentina, 34 years, is a migrant herself and studies to become a school assistant. She has personal experience in migration and socializes with other migrants, too. However, she has not attended any previous trainings in mentoring, nor has she had any experience in mentoring before this process.

She wanted to get involved in mentoring activities because she wanted to help other migrants in integration to the Finnish culture without unnecessary stress. She was also wishing to familiarize with new people and their cultures as well as find new friends. Simultaneously, she expected to get peer support herself. She would be able to share her own good and bad experiences she had met while living in Finland.

She was hoping to find pleasant collaboration and was a bit worried about a possible language barrier because her English competence is weak. On the other hand, the aim was to use Finnish with the mentees, which also happened. *"I think that it was good for the mentees to be forced to use their brains and remember words while they had to speak Finnish with me. This is the fastest way to learn a new language and it is the way I have learned Finnish!"* Valentina tells.

Valentina learned during the mentoring training about the tasks and tools of mentors to be used with migrants. They also gave her insight and understanding for multiculturalism and encounters. Mentoring started fast and without problems. Cooperation with two mentees worked well and they had a good time, possibly thanks to Valentina's open, positive and talkative personality. In her opinion, this kind of a process is important to migrants. She hopes that mentors

would understand the significance of the process for migrants and, so, would commit themselves into it with genuine will and passion.

There was no language barrier – some slight communication problems occurred, though. Valentina solved them by using non-verbal communication, e.g. gestures, facial expressions and movements as well as the Google translator. There were some other challenges, too, such as long distances, tight study schedules, difficulty in finding time for meetings and noisy meeting spots. Valentina knew, however, who could have helped her in these difficulties if she had needed it.

Valentina and her mentees used 1 to 2 hours at a time for the mentoring meetings. If they had had more time, she would have wanted to meet them more often because there was need for it. In addition to that, they communicated via SMS messages, which, for Valentina, was not the best way. *"I like to meet people face to face. SMS messages do not convey facial expressions, feelings or the tones of the voice. I can easily misunderstand the messages. That is why it is important for me to meet real people, not just emojis",* Valentina says.

Valentina has an improvement idea for the mentoring process: it could last longer, at least six months, preferably even a year. She is happy for the time spent together with her mentees because it apparently was useful for them although it only lasted three months this time. She also got two new friends and together they learned Finnish.

Tips for future mentors from Valentina:

- Be brave, open and genuinely interested.
- Communication is easy, for instance, via SMS and Messenger.
- Activities together: playing games, reading books, shopping or going to cafés.
- Conversations can be easily started by asking how you are, talking about cultural differences and life situations.
- You will gain most when everybody is active in contacts.

MARIA'S MENTORING STORY

Maria was only 16 and a first-year student when she decided to join the mentoring activities for migrants. She attends the dual degree program including both general upper secondary and basic vocational social and health care studies. She had an interesting experience a couple of years ago on family friendships with asylum seekers. Her mother lived next to a reception center and Maria met asylum seekers there. She had no prior training for multicultural encounters before this mentoring training.

"I found family friendship activities interesting; I got to know mentoring and I wanted to be helpful and useful as well as to learn about new cultures", Maria lists when asked why she wanted to become a mentor of a migrant. She also felt that this competence can be useful in social and health care sector as you have to know how to work with different people. Meeting new people made her a bit excited, however, but she started with open mind. There were some questions in her mind concerning what mentoring is in practice and whether she will be able to keep in touch continuously. She describes her feelings excited but enthusiastic prior to the beginning of mentoring.

Maria learned about cultural and communication differences as well as about the mentor's role during the training program. *"One thing can carry a totally different meaning for us and them. For instance, hand marks mean different things in different cultures. Good mentoring implies good purpose and guidance to information sources, if you do not have direct answers yourself",* she tells. In the first meeting, conversation started fluently with the mentee. *"We familiarized ourselves with each other at first, but soon we found many other topics to discuss, and it was good to realize in the start meeting that there were others in the same situation",* Maria says.

When Maria's mentee did not understand some Finnish words, she used to help either in English or with the help of the Google translator. Sometimes, their conversation was about to be led in English since it was easier and faster to the mentee, but then they tried to switch into Finnish. The mentee had a good idea to record their conversations to be remembered later and to teach Finnish to her wife, too, but they forgot it. Also, they often met in noisy places and recording might not have been successful.

"I thoroughly enjoyed mentoring though we did not meet every week. It was normally me who started the message chains. However, live meetings were most rewarding for us both and both of us were unhappy if we could not meet due to our life situations", Maria describes the process. An especially happy memory for her concerns the encounter of the little daughter of the mentee. He was friendly and polite, and Maria even learned a few words of her mentee's mother tongue! Meetings in different places, e.g. in the Natural Museum, were rewarding and inspired them to discuss different topics.

There were no major problems in the process, nor did Maria need extra help. She discussed and changed ideas on mentoring with another mentor. *"I thought I had a lot of time for it but then I realized I had hobbies and other interests, too. On the other hand, I feel I had enough time for this work, too. Mentoring does not demand too much time and you can always organize things according to the schedules of both. If you meet via Skype, you will not even have to travel elsewhere",* Maria says thinking of her schedule planning.

Maria hopes that her mentee got answers to his questions as well as linguistic support. She introduced him to the Finnish society. She feels to have gained a lot for her professional development. Practical nurses work with many different people, so, the experiences on mentoring and multicultural issues may help her find a job. In addition to that, some parts of her studies were recognized and validated thanks to the mentor training.

What kind of advice would Maria give to future mentors? *“It is important for both the mentor and the mentee to understand the rules. The mentor does not have to plan anything special – the everyday life matters are important. No extra money has to be used but some extra time has to be saved for the meetings, instead. Keep your mind open and come along!” she replies.* Why should one get involved, then? *“After this, you will understand more about other cultures and you become more broad-minded. I believe that this kind of an experience is highly valued in the working life and migrants definitely appreciate to be included in the Finnish society,”* Maria adds.

ELISABETH’S MENTORING STORY

Elisabeth, 30 years, is a student of domestic and cleaning services at the Jyväskylä College of Services. Her mentoring story is interesting due to the fact that she was a mentee herself in 2017. Now, she decided to become a mentor to be able to help other migrants become braver. She knows from her own experience that entering a new country can be tough. She arrived to Finland from Kongo more than six years ago.

“I assumed that mentoring might be a bit difficult since cultures and religions are different. On the other hand, I was expecting to be able to help someone in need of help and support. I wanted to help my mentee understand and accept Finland and the Finnish society but also encourage him/her to show his/her own culture to others. I find it important to cooperate with different people from different cultures and understand each other”, Elisabeth tells of her hopes and expectations on mentor’s job.

Getting started made Elisabeth a bit nervous since she thought that she might not have a good enough command on the Finnish language. Simultaneously, she understood how important it is to be a mentor because she had a good mentor herself a year ago. *“During the training, I learned that culture is an important part of one’s life. Culture is the way we think and do things. Own culture is important to everyone but it is important to know about other cultures,”* Elisabeth recalls the training.

Elisabeth was satisfied after having met her mentee. She was a brave person and it was easy to start. They spoke Finnish and there were no major difficulties. However, it was sometimes

difficult to find time. *"Mentoring was rewarding for me but as a single mother I had to plan my schedule carefully. Luckily, everything went well,"* she says.

Everyday mentoring meant for Elisabeth a contact with her mentee almost daily. Normally, mentoring took ca. three hours weekly. They often met at the college and also sent messages to each other. Elisabeth felt that she was able to support her mentee in discussing the challenges of integration and life in general. They talked a lot about future and migrants' lives in Finland. Moreover, she hopes that she was able to give courage and motivation to her.

"I had a chance to learn to know a new nice person. It is important to be positive although there are troubles sometimes. It is great to be able to help someone as you become more courageous yourself, too," Elisabeth tells about mentoring. She also learnt skills needed in her future profession; now she can help and give advice more easily. Elisabeth also points out that mentoring could be useful for Finns, too, for example in cases of loneliness.

Elisabeth has a few tips for future mentors: *"Try to understand your mentee and find out where you could give your support. Do not force the process but ask, instead, how you could help your mentee, what he/she would like to do and what to talk about. Understanding and motivation are the most important companions of a mentor."* According to Elisabeth, mentoring could be run partly in groups. Some people feel more relaxed with a larger number of peers.

Mentees' Stories

AHMED'S MENTEE STORY

Ahmed, from Iraq, is a student of electrical engineering and automation at Gradia Jyväskylä. In his home country, he has already graduated with a degree of an electrical engineer. The 31-year-old wanted a mentor because he desired to learn to speak Finnish. He was hoping to learn to know a Finn and discuss in Finnish. It was important for him to find someone who could speak Finnish slowly enough. Since the mentors were properly trained, they would certainly understand this wish.

Ahmed, himself, thought that he could not speak Finnish very well at the time they started mentoring. He found Finnish difficult and so very different from other languages and that is why he was a bit nervous. Meeting new people made him nervous, too, since he was wondering what they might think of him. Fortunately, his mentor was very nice and they got along well.

Keeping in touch with his mentor was simple; they contacted each other via WhatsApp and face-to-face meetings. They always wrote messages in Finnish and they tried to speak Finnish

as much as possible. Sometimes they had switch into English, especially with complicated matters. Ahmed would occasionally translate his mentor's messages into English and check his own messages by the Google Translator. However, he realized that it was not always very reliable in translations.

Did Ahmed learn to speak Finnish? *"Yes! My mentor helped me in explaining things in Finnish and sometimes in English and trying to speak slowly. Now I speak Finnish more and better than before"*, Ahmed replies. His life situation was not very easy by the time of mentoring and he wants to thank his mentor for understanding and patience. Nevertheless, the process was rewarding and very useful.

"I gained more self-confidence and courage to speak Finnish. I learned to remember a lot of new words in practical situations. With the help of my mentor I got more information on Finns and learned to understand Finnish sense of humor. I think that the Finns are self-confident, and they have a lot of opportunities in their lives. They can decide upon their future themselves. In my home country, the situation is not always the same", Ahmed continues.

Ahmed is hoping that his mentor would have gained more motivation for her studies from the mentoring process. She certainly learned, too, that many things in Finland are better than in many other countries. The Finnish society works well. He wants the Finns know that this excellent system is something to be taken care of in the future, too.

"We visited flea markets, took walks downtown, got to know each other, wrote a lot of messages and went to museums. We discussed usual everyday matters, the Finnish language, professional issues, TV programs and the future," Ahmed replies when asked what he did with his mentor and what they talked about. The spent time together about once a week which was okay for Ahmed.

Ahmed wants to give this advice for future mentors: *"It is important for a mentor to understand that people are different. There are good people and bad people coming from all cultural backgrounds, also from the Finnish one. It is good that the mentor tries to understand other cultures. He/she should be friendly and straight-forward even if there are complicated matters. If any problems occur in the mentoring relationship, one should at once tell about them, for instance, to the teacher."*

Ahmed is satisfied to have been understood by his mentor in the occasions when he had no time to meet up with her. Sometimes it is not easy to organize a meeting. The mentor should not be sad or crossed if the mentee cannot be contacted. There is probably a good reason for it!

FAUZIA'S MENTEE STORY

"I wanted to meet new people, learn to speak Finnish and get support for my studies," Fauzia, 40 years, from Kenya lists the arguments she wanted a mentor in the autumn 2018. She is a Practical Nurse student at Gradia Jämsä and works simultaneously. In her home country, she has had various jobs, but she has been interested in nursing professions for long.

How were Fauzia's expectations for her mentor? *"I wanted to find a nice person with whom I could talk about different things in my life"*, she replies. After all, it was easy to contact her mentor and she did not feel nervous about mentoring, at all. At the moment, Fauzia would advise new mentees: *"Relax, follow your feelings and get to know your mentor!"*

The Finnish language was mainly used during the mentoring process. Fauzia's Finnish competence is good but she wanted to check some special expressions and words in English. The mentoring process was over very fast and there were many time-consuming matters in Fauzia's private life during the autumn, too. So, she did not have so much time for the mentoring as she would have hoped. On the other hand, WhatsApp was helpful in contacting when they did not have time to meet.

Fauzia feels to have received support through mentoring. *"I learned to speak Finnish and I had a chance to discuss everyday matters of life,"* she tells. The process was successful in every standard. Her mentor gained something, too, thinks Fauzia. *"She had an opportunity to learn to know a new person with a different cultural background and learn more about her culture, too"*, she says.

In addition to WhatsApp, Fauzia kept in touch with her mentor in face-to-face meetings. They contacted each other several times a week via messages and they went to cafés, too. They discussed studies, children and all kinds of everyday life matters. And could Fauzia plan to attend the mentoring process again? *"Yes. It was a good and rewarding experience and I would be happy to attend it again as soon as my life situation becomes more stable"*, she replies.

SAJIDA'S MENTEE STORY

Sajida is 27 years old and comes from Iraq. She was a university student and worked as a teacher. Today, she aims at a new profession as a cook and studies at the Jyväskylä College of Services. In autumn 2018, both mentors and mentees were looked for. Sajida got interested. *"Since I do not have enough time for my friends during free time, I wanted to find a mentor at the college; so, it would be easy to meet during schooldays. I was hoping to be able*

to integrate better and learn more about the surrounding society. It is sometimes quite stressful at school and the mentor could help me with it as well as with my actual studies”, Sajida says.

Sajida was hoping to find a partner for discussions and she expected to learn new Finnish words. She used to be frightened to speak Finnish earlier since she thought she would say something wrong. However, she was not nervous with the mentor and it was easy to get to know each other. Sajida thinks that mentoring is a good idea. *“Sometimes people are shy and, so, do not get a chance to talk with anybody. It is great that two people can speak to one another. New projects and activities are needed to be offered, especially, to asylum seekers since otherwise they would just get passive and stressed in the reception centers”, she says.*

Her wish to learn new words was fulfilled during the mentoring process. Sajida learned them, for instance, by texting messages to her mentor. They always used Finnish and if there were any understanding problems, the mentor would explain them to Sajida. Sometimes Sajida used a dictionary. In addition to messaging, they met at school several times a week.

“I found a friend and it was really important for me. Culture is a significant issue for me and that is why I wanted to know more about someone else’s culture. We still keep in touch”, Sajida tells about her mentoring experience. She hopes that her mentor also feels to have found a new friend of her. Because Sajida and her mentor studied at the same college, they often met by lunch and told each other about their studies.

“A mentor can be very valuable for a migrant. He/she may easily think that no one wants to be friends with him/her and, so, is always alone”, Sajida wonders the meaning of mentoring to migrants. She wants to encourage people to be mentors for migrants. “Do not be frightened. You have a chance to find a friend and you will learn new things.” Finally, Sajida explains what a good mentor is like. “He/she talks a lot!”

OLEG’S MENTEE STORY

“Aren’t I lucky to have had such a good mentor!” Oleg, a 46-year old Russian immediately says when asked about mentoring. He noticed a message telling about the possibility to get a personal mentor in his Wilma Student Database at Gradia Jyväskylä. Oleg is presently a student in a preparatory study program for vocational studies. He has graduated as a social worker and also worked as a shopkeeper in his home country. Although he found information on mentoring himself, he would prefer face-to-face information shared by the teachers of migrant groups.

Why did Oleg want a mentor, then? He reckoned that it is an opportunity to speak Finnish. He was mostly looking forward to discussions but also hoping to get support in translations of the

spoken language as well as in everyday life's matters. The man already widely seen life did not feel nervous about mentoring. His mentor was talkative, exactly like Oleg himself, and they soon found similar notes.

According to Oleg, to give good advice to the mentee is the most important task of the mentor. There were no difficulties in communicating in Finnish. *"My mentor tried to speak slowly and clearly. In texting my messages, I used the Google translator because it makes it a lot faster. The mentor offered help if I had linguistic difficulties"*, Oleg says.

Oleg met his mentor every other week, about 90 minutes at a time. Moreover, they sent messages via WhatsApp always before meeting each other to discuss what they would like to do. They, for instance, went to the Pharmacist's and learnt Nordic walking. They discussed a lot, e.g. children and everyday issues. The Finnish language is difficult for Oleg but important to learn, so, it was one of their main topics.

Oleg found a new hobby, gained more language skills and was helped in buying his medicine as well as other kind of shopping. He has definitely taught patience to his mentor! The process took about three months, which was convenient for Oleg. Meetings every other week were okay, too, although he could have met his mentor more often. Oleg wants to advice other mentees: *"Try to get everything out of your mentor and be flexible as you agree upon your meeting schedule!"*