



MENTORING NEETS

in theory and practice

Jaana Poikolainen, Vappu Myllärinen & Ilari Salomaa (eds.)

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Leverage from
the EU
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Juvenia

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FOREWORD

This book in your hands is based on the international European Social Fund project *Generational Intelligent Mentoring of NEET Young* (2018–2021). The project was carried out in Finland by the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Juvenia) with an international co-operation network from Poland (the BD Center) and Bulgaria (NGO Peonies). The objective of the whole project was to develop a new generational intelligent mentoring model to work with young people, which especially facilitated the schooling and employment of NEET youth (young people not in education, employment or training).

The theme of the book is very topical, as the status and numbers of NEET youth at the EU level are worrying and new approaches and methods are needed. The book also highlights the importance of transnational co-operation in benchmarking and comparative co-development.

The book introduces country-specific research information and the innovative practices and experiments carried out together with the young people. Focusing on NEET youth, it also discusses the societal context of marginalization. The book is a strong “polyphonic” publication compiling the views of researchers, developers and students of this specific field.

The book should work as excellent study material for students in youth and social fields. It should also find its way to the hands of professionals working with NEET youth. I wish to thank the editors and all the contributors to the book and project.

In Mikkeli, 04.06.2021

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1 CREATION OF THE MENTORING PROCESS – INTRODUCTION

Jaana Poikolainen & Vappu Myllärinen

Young people now live in a period of history where life is lived more intensively in a digital environment than in the year 2019. When the project *Generational Intelligent Mentoring of NEET Young* (ESF 2018–2021) was designed, there was no clues that everyday life would change so dramatically. The project itself has been affected, like everything else in life, by the Covid-19 pandemic, and much project material and implementation have been transformed into a digital form. This is shown particularly in articles written by the Finnish project team.

In Finland, young people are encouraged to become individuals, who make their own plans and decisions about the future. However, finding their educational path or placement in working life independently is not simple. The age of compulsory education will rise from 16 to 18 years in August 2021 and young people are under the pressure of having to make these significant decisions about their future when even younger than before.

Young people need support from other generations to build their life course. Nowadays the family of the young person is not always a central supportive network. With the help of a volunteer mentor or group mentor, which consists either of their own immediate circle or other representatives of previous generations, young people may find their own goal more easily.

The general objective of the project was, and still is, to intensify the transition of European NEET (not in education, employment or training) youth to education and to working life. The aim is to catch up and to support NEET young people who cannot utilize youth services fully nowadays with the help of the generation intelligent mentoring model. The concept of generational intelligence refers to the connection between the generations and means an empathic reciprocal attitude between the generations. The mentoring model functions as one potential tool to help the NEET young seek employment and suitable education. In the project, the mentors also benefit. The dialogical mentoring relationship benefits both the actors (youth) and mentors.

The practices of the generational intelligent mentoring project of NEET youth are shared in three culturally different countries: Finland, Poland and Bulgaria. The tools and innovations

of the mentoring, which are suitable for supporting the situation in life of the young people, have been sought out. Measures and objectives have been specified together with the project actors. Transnational co-operation has been carried out with three organizations, each with extensive knowledge of the situation of NEETs in their countries. The Polish BD Centre has been working for years to help NEET youth. The organization has good co-operation networks, which became very clear when we became acquainted with their activities in the spring of 2018. The Bulgarian NGO Peonies has been in operation for a few years, and their goal is also to open new paths for NEET youths towards education and employment. The youth research and development centre Juvenia, in Finland, has wide experience of youth projects, which help and support different kinds of youth groups.

Transnational co-operation makes sense, as the number of NEETs is high in each of the countries involved in the project: working together to develop a solution to the problem. A common challenge has been that young people return to NEET status after activating action. There is a need for tools and techniques to strengthen the inclusion of young people so that they find a suitable place for themselves in education, employment or training. The project, together with the transnational consortium, has been working on mentoring methods to improve and strengthen the well-being of young people.

The objective of the whole project has been to develop a new operation model for working with the young people: generational intelligent mentoring which facilitates the schooling and employment of NEET youth. The objectives of the project and operation were designed together with the members of the consortium. The objectives of every sub-project are in line with the main objects but each also has its own special focus areas. For example, XAMK supports and enriches mentoring with the methods of creative industry.

Individual articles reflected the fact that the societies in participating countries are not comparable in many ways, even if the challenges the young people face do not vary so very much. Therefore, it is interesting to read how ideas and concepts, e.g. from the Finnish context, are modified and implemented in different environments.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part includes articles which contain research results, background information and country context. The second describes practical experiences and experiments.

The first part of the publication starts with an article from Jaana Poikolainen, *Supportive activities for NEET youth*, in which the writer views the changing definition of NEET youth depending on life stage and circumstances. Poikolainen also theorizes on mentoring as a process and distinguishes four different generations of mentoring.

In the article *Mentoring young people – A Finnish context in the Mentoring NEETs project*, Vappu Myllärinen outlines the possibilities and the hurdles of finding a right place for mentoring in a Finnish context, in a society where the welfare state is still going strong but where civil society and voluntary work also play a significant role.

In the next article, *The principles of working with NEET youth*, is research conducted in Poland, written by Damian Liszka and Paweł Walawender. The research consists of the opinions of 35 youth workers on working with NEET youth, who were interviewed by using an individual in-depth interview technique, which is one of the qualitative methods used in social research. The answers can be used as a framework for youth workers in the future.

The last article in part one is written by Małgorzata Krywult-Albańska. *Mentoring for NEETs from the perspective of the project's users – reflections based on research in Poland* consists of the opinions of 70 youth workers selected from different sectors in Polish society. They give their opinion about the solutions adopted in Finland and how they could be modified and adequately used in the Polish context.

Part two of the publication starts with an article from Tiina Ikkonen and Susanna Soisalo: *Video and online workshops as tools to involve youth*. The article is a description of methods using in filming and in videos in youth work for self-expression, learning and entertainment. The Finnish project team developed an online group mentoring workshop, *Kaupunkilyhäri* (a City Short Film) which is inspired by city symphonies, a movie genre created in the 1920s.

In the next article, *How might we? Co-creating a service that meets the needs of NEET young, youth work professionals and voluntary mentors*, the author Tiina Ikkonen introduces the concept of service design, the method which has been used principally when developing workshops and processes in the project.

In the article, *Digital accessibility*, Jani Lehtinen writes about how the digital content of the web pages and mobile applications have been made accessible for everybody. The digital service law (306/2019) has been in effect from 1 April 2019.

Ilari Salomaa's and Sangara Novaks's article, *Co-operating locally to promote the mentoring project*, is a review of how the multi-professional network in the Kymenlaakso region working with youth was linked to the *Mentoring NEETs* project and how this kind of co-operation can benefit young people as well as the different operators.

In *Experiences of mentoring young people*, author Susanna Soisalo describes her feelings and observations about the mentoring she conducted via the project's own Discord channel.

The last three articles are from a Bulgarian perspective. In the *NEETsLAB – project resumé* article Valeria Nikolova talks about how the concept of the project is born out of the need to introduce innovative tools for working with NEET youth in a demanding environment.

In *Results from innovation 1 – “Matti – Men’s journeys to work”*, authors Snezhina Churova and Valeria Nikolova introduce *Matti* – a project implemented earlier in Finland by XAMK. Innovations from the project were tested on 12 young people from the NEET group in Bulgaria.

The last article in part two, *Results for the second innovation – new instruments, “Inno_mentor”*, by Snezhina Churova and Valeria Nikolova is a description of a set of three tools tested and applied to 21 young people from Bulgaria. The tools are as follows: individual digital mentoring, interest groups and club houses.

PART ONE: **THEORY**



2 SUPPORTIVE ACTIVITIES FOR NEET YOUTH

Jaana Poikolainen

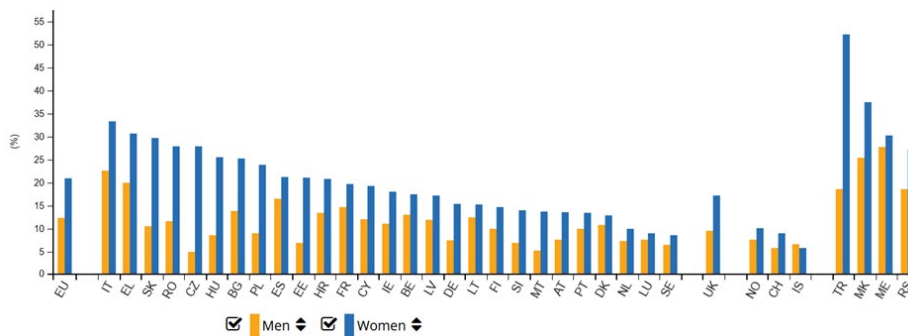
As a phenomenon, being categorized as NEET is problematic for both young people and society. The long-term exclusion of a young person from education, work and training can be the beginning of a sustained exclusion from society for a long time, and even for the rest of their lives in terms of social inclusion and livelihood. Europe's population is ageing and the dependency ratio is declining, so from a national economic point of view, there is a need to find solutions to the risk factors for the exclusion of young people, such as NEET positions of different lengths.

2.1 Who are the NEET youth?

When defining young people who are outside labour markets and education, the concept of NEET (not in education, employment or training) has been used for longer than two decades. It has been stated that the concept is narrow even for research purposes. To find young people who belong to that category is not simple and it positions youth differently compared to their own definitions about their position. (Hallstein Holte 2017.)

When we planned the project, we used a wider definition of NEET. For example, some young people wait for access to education or employment after military service, meaning the NEET period is quite short. Unemployment can also be a cause by having a so-called short-term unemployment between part-time jobs, but there may also be long-term unemployment among young people. The NEET position may be the consequence of family reasons, illness or injury. There are so-called discouraged youth who have a prolonged NEET period and whose future prospects are not bright. (Eurofound 2016.) As a new challenge, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the lives of young people, with many households having financial difficulties caused by unemployment (Eurofound 2020).

The age of young people is determined in various ways in different countries and statistics depending on purposes of research. The following picture (Picture 1) presents the numbers of NEET youth of ages 20–34. (According to Finnish Youth Law (Nuorisolaki 2016) youth are 16–29 years old.) In Finland in the year 2019 almost 10% of men and 14.5 % of the female population were NEET. The number is high.



Picture 1. NEET youth (age 20–34) 2019 (Eurostat online)

Several studies show that the positions of both the fortunate and the underprivileged descend. On the basis of education and income level, fortunate parents have more resources to help, to guide, to finance and to secure their children’s status as adults. In addition, the low social economic position of the family during childhood may lead to weaker resources in the next generation (for example Vauhkonen, Kallio & Erola 2017).

2.2 Mentoring in the Finnish context

In Finland, there is an supporting service system for young people. Not all young people who have temporary difficulties need formal support. Informal mentoring may be enough when the young person does not need professional support.

Traditionally, mentoring refers to a situation where, for example, an experienced employee or person guides, helps and supports a younger person (actor) purposefully and jointly by agreeing on mentoring practices. At the beginning of the mentoring process, the actors need to clarify what they need from a mentor and what kind of change they want to bring out. Do they need a coach to figure out what kind of education they need to receive a suitable workplace for themselves or is it a new career in a new life situation? You also need to think about what kind of mentoring relationship the actor wants. Does the mentor act as a “ball wall” of thoughts, or is the aim to encourage, challenge and expand perspectives, identify opportunities or increase motivation? There is also a need to consider what kind of person could be the best coach for youth. What values, age, personality, and experiences of the mentor meet the youths’ needs best? (Ristikangas, Clutterbuck & Manner 2014.)

Mentoring styles can be accepting, questioning, challenging, storytelling, advisory or encouraging (Kupias & Salo 2014). Generally it has been stated that the mentor listens, guides, evaluates, gives instructions, discusses and helps, but also asks questions. A good

mentor is objective, committed and devotes time to mentoring. The mentor focuses on the issue and the topic from the actor's point of view and is ready to share his or her own skills, expertise and life experience. Mentoring is interaction between people, in activities between two people or in group situations. In the long run the mentors should be aware that situations and things change with and during the process.

From different forms of mentoring the idea is that mentors are seen as equal with actors; they may possess the same kind of values or have been in similar life situations. The mentor and actor may also mentor each other. There is also diversity mentoring, which aims to increase equal opportunities for development for the target group (e.g. different genders, ethnic minorities or physically disadvantaged people). Virtual mentoring is implemented by phone, Skype, email or text message (Ristikangas, Clutterbuck & Manner 2014.) In digital youth work Discord (a virtual youth club) has also been used for several years and it also suits mentoring.

One can talk about different generations of mentoring. The mentoring of the first generation was mainly about the transfer of knowledge from the mentor to the mentee. Second generation mentoring, in addition to the transfer of knowledge, emphasized the learning role and understanding of the actor. Third generation mentoring is a preparatory mentoring in which the actor's own goals and needs are further emphasized and the role of the mentor became more open: the mentor listens and has conversations with the actor. Fourth generation mentoring has a dialogical mentoring relationship. Dialogue in a mentoring discussion means that the parties work together to produce something new; it is as if they are thinking together.

Of course, everyday discussion, exchange of opinions and defence are also needed, but dialogue is something that can take the mentoring discussion to a new level and bring the elements, even conflicting ones, into a better balance with each other.

2.3 Trust as a supporting force

The mentoring process can be successful only if there is trust between the mentor and actor. Many young people have faced derogative experiences and therefore they need to construct trust in new services and people. If the young people do not have trust for institutional services it complicates their trust of even informal services. (Honkanen, Poikolainen & Karlsson 2018; Raatikainen & Poikolainen 2020.) Mentoring suits young people who need the volunteer person as the discussion partner to think, for example, about those matters which are related to education and employment. Many young people need only some support, someone with whom to reflect on their own thoughts. The dialogic discussions are confidential: and in bipartite mentoring relationships, the young person needs to trust the mentor and vice versa.

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3 MENTORING YOUNG PEOPLE – A FINNISH CONTEXT IN THE MENTORING NEETS PROJECT

Vappu Myllärinen

In this article, I will discuss those aspects one must consider when implementing mentoring for young people in the Finnish context. There are differences between every society, but in Scandinavia, one must consider the role of a strong public sector, the complicated system that is built around social- and health care services, i.e. services that people need for themselves or for their dependants that help them cope in their everyday life.

Having said that, there is also a longstanding tradition of voluntary work in my country. There are a couple of prominent NGOs that concentrate especially on issues with children and young people and they work quite closely together with the public sector. Finding the right “slot” for voluntary-based mentoring is not a simple task even if one recognizes the need for such a service. Therefore, it is necessary to explain why our society is built as it is.

Using a recent study of NEET youth and their view of public services, I will argue my case that there is a definite need for a low threshold service like voluntary mentoring. The study gives a voice to young people who are not studying or working and how they view our society and their place in it.

Finally, I will conceptualize the mentoring process as we see it in the *Mentoring NEETS* project, and how it differs from the traditional mentoring that takes place in the work place and in higher education.

3.1 The Nordic welfare state – a determined project of inclusion

During the period following the Second World War and especially from the 1960s onwards there were some very dramatic changes in social welfare in all Scandinavian countries. Social welfare established itself as the third major welfare sector alongside health care and education. The number of staff, professions and clients grew at a phenomenal rate, training expanded and the sector became professionalized. At this point, the very ideology of social

welfare changed dramatically and transformed in a large part into a social service. Control and forced measures had only a marginal presence in the new service system. (Sipilä 1997.)

The Nordic welfare state is called a “public service state”, because most social and health care services are funded from tax revenue and are provided by public – either local or regional – authorities. The principle of “universalism” is extended also to include, in addition to cash benefits, access to health and social care services. In particular, the social care services are available for and used by a significantly larger proportion of the population than in the other European welfare states (Anttonen & Sipilä 1996). High professional standards for universal services have also been an important policy goal in Nordic countries. The widening of the principle of high professional standards from health care and education to social care services is a characteristic that is not as evident in other welfare states.

The cornerstone of the whole system was the increase in the public production of services, especially childcare and other services to children and young people, as well as for the elderly. This new institutional interplay between the state and the family was followed by a new conception of equality and new relations between women and the state. There was now a growing recognition of the deeper complexities involved in the need for services. For instance, day care for children was not needed simply to intervene in situations of lack of care or to ensure a good early education. It was understood that parents who had a paid job should get the child care services they needed. This has evolved to the subjective right for early-childhood education.

The way social and health care services are arranged has a significant impact on Scandinavian societies. For instance, it is an important explanation for the great proportion of public sector jobs in the total employment numbers, and particularly, in the employment of women. The extent of social care services is often linked to the high rate of female participation in wage labour. Universal health services reduce the socio-economic risks linked with the need for health care, and universal social care services reduce the socio-economic risks linked with having dependent children and elderly people in the family (Kautto 1999).

One of the prime movers of the Scandinavian welfare system has been a longstanding ambition to ideologically reform social welfare and to create a highly democratic and stable society. The idea was to transform objects into subjects, to move away from forcing people to adapt towards effecting change in society, to fight for civil rights and freedom. The individual right to health and social services is greatly emphasized in every Nordic country. Foreigners are often amazed to hear citizens in the Nordic countries taking a very positive attitude, not only towards their country but often the state as well. In everyday conversations people talk of society when they actually mean the state and its services.

Now, there is much to criticize and question in our welfare system. There is a great pressure for the ageing nation to provide services for everybody else besides the growing numbers of elderly citizens when the work force is shrinking. In particular, preventive services have decreased at an alarming rate. In next chapter, I will describe how voluntary organizations and civil society can support the public sector and reduce the feelings of exclusion in society.

3.2 The voluntary work tradition in Finland

Volunteering means taking action on issues that you feel are important. Volunteering does not replace professional work in social services, but volunteers bring their own personal contribution to the activities. Volunteering is very valuable both for individuals and the community. Volunteer work enhances communal trust and social capital, which are the bases of economic development in the society.

In Finland, volunteers help prevent loneliness and social exclusion, promote arts and culture, organize sports club activities, keep nature and the environment clean, and promote the well-being of people and animals in many ways. The next chapters are a compilation from the *Study on Volunteering in the European Union / Country Report Finland*.

As demonstrated earlier in this article, a state-based social security system was established in the 1960s, and the Finnish state took over responsibility for most activities, which had previously been organized by organizations in the informal sector (i.e. voluntary organizations).

It was actually thought that voluntary activities were of a transitory nature and would progressively disappear as the state guaranteed better and more equitable services. This thinking continued into the early 1990s with the major expansion of public services, and voluntary activities were primarily used to fill gaps in public service provision rather than acting as an independent sector.

However, despite this, it is important to note that during the 1970s there was still a strong tendency towards social organizational work and many political parties, trade unions and youth organizations were increasingly active. Indeed, volunteering did not disappear and the number of voluntary associations continued to grow. A significant change in attitude came with the economic crisis that took place in the early and mid-1990s. Finland's public finances hit the wall and public services were drastically reorganized. The budget cuts hurt all services hard, but especially those designed for children and young people and a significant increase in voluntary organizations was seen in social and health service fields.

Voluntary activities once again became a core element of Finnish society and attention was being paid to the role of voluntary organizations in creating employment. Today, as stated earlier in this article, people still believe strongly in the welfare state, but the voluntary sector has found an important place in the society.

Voluntary work in Finland has been characterized by a focus on membership. In fact, around 75–80% of the Finnish population are members of voluntary organizations in their lifetime, and many individuals hold memberships with several different organizations over the course of their lifetime. Having said that *talkoot* [working together for a common goal for a specific time-period] together with other informal forms of volunteering such as neighbourly help have been and continue to be widespread.

The EU's country report states that although the sheer number of voluntary organizations remains high in Finland, membership based volunteering is in decline. Voluntary members of local voluntary organizations are getting older and therefore there is a concern about the future of voluntary work. There are no signs of less interest in voluntary work, but Finnish people, and young people in particular, now prefer to determine the level of their involvement. They speak more openly about what they want to achieve with their voluntary engagement (e.g. influencing by starting citizens' initiatives) and volunteers switch more easily from one voluntary organization to another. There is also more interest in project based volunteering.

What concerns me as a citizen, and what relates to implementing mentoring or other similar low threshold voluntary services, is that there are many studies showing how support systems and preventive measures for families and in schools never recover budget cuts once they have been made, and voluntary organizations have not been able to patch up the damage. Lack of these preventive services is especially important for vulnerable children and young people and there is a real worry that Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns will affect younger generations in a same manner as children of the economic depression of the 1990s.

3.3 How young people view the public services – recent research findings from NEET youth interviews

In this chapter, I will review a recent study *Are we part of society? On the future, democracy and public services – Thoughts of young people outside of education and work* by Anu Gretschel and Sami Myllyniemi (2020). In the study, participating young people were interviewed twice, by youth workers, and by a researcher. The aim was to gather knowledge from young people whose life situations may be challenging and who do not participate in the inter-

views organized by phone for 15–29-year-olds for the general Youth Barometer. Opinions were asked relating to well-being, public services and democracy. For the second in-depth interviews (35 from 117) young people were encouraged to tell their life story, in order to find out what kind of factors and services have had an impact on their life, career choices and on their future. The interviews were conducted in different parts of Finland.

Alarmingly but expectedly, the results showed the low level of life satisfaction of those young people who, at the time, found themselves outside education and work. The findings indicated that the situation got worse when the young person has been unemployed for longer than 12 months and for those who belonged to a minority sexual orientation or gender. This study shows how important it is to reach out to those in most need of help, and use the indicators in the reform and allocation of youth policy resources.

According to the research, young people agree on certain common hindering factors that lead to a deterioration in life satisfaction. Those are:

- being bullied during classes 7–9 of elementary school (14–16-years-old);
- a low level of support and encouragement received from their own parents and in general in relation to bullying;
- the pressure felt in a rushed society in relation to starting their studies, or to jump into the workforce, despite the young people feeling a lack of ability due to, for example, issues of health (Gretchel & Myllyniemi 2020, 11).

It also seems that young people have accepted a view where only those who have achieved success in studies and working life earn a place inside society. This kind of thinking can increase the level of inequality in society. The situation can be especially difficult for those young people who are, for whatever reason, unable to get a higher education and later, to get full-time work.

It unfortunately appears to be that the impact of the Youth Guarantee type of guiding policy in Finnish society is not properly evaluated, especially from the point of view of those young people who have been in counselling for a long time, even as long as 10–15 years.

To me the most worrying conclusion from the study is this: the concentration on education and on work guidance seems to leave the other needs of young people unresolved and without attention. Based on the experiences of young people, the problems not faced during counselling are often those affecting their well-being the most. This suggests that individual life situations, as a whole, are not taken into account when discussing education and work opportunities.

Still, most of the young people interviewed believe that all their problems are solvable with enough good quality services, and that they actually expect society to take better care of them by improving its services.

3.4 How can we better support our young people?

In the conclusion of the study, Gretschel and Myllyniemi (2020) write that the reasons why one cannot participate in education or employment are varied. It is these root causes that we should concentrate on, because it is evident that being left outside education and employment is a very real risk for the well-being of young people. We have statistics of mental health problems and other indications to back up that notion.

Problems start to pile up when a young person cannot proceed as they had planned or as society expects them to do, and when they do not have the resources or the right environment to process and discuss their problems. One young person participating in the study brought up the lack of these kind of mentoring discussions in society. Where are the adults and the Socrates type of characters who would discuss everyday life with young people? (Gretschel & Myllyniemi 2020, 81.)

Because the fact remains that some young people do not gain education or employment, and it would benefit them to know how society and public services can support them to achieve better well-being. Why can they not do voluntary or part-time work without it causing red tape disasters? Young people want to “belong” and be productive members of society even if they are not able to do so in a way that is expected of them.

If official discourse and public policies do not accept people who are outside education or employment, then how can we help young persons who factually are outside education or employment, and more importantly, make them feel good about themselves? In the study, only very few young person felt that all people are a part of a society. More than that, some related that they felt “lesser” than other people. Almost all young people who felt like this had been bullied in school: children bully children and young people bully young people because they are somehow different, and this also happens outside the school environment. All this tells a story of growing inequality, inhumanity and lack of trust. Therefore we need to keep asking if young people feel that they belong in a society and if not, why not.

The study showed that the well-being of young people clearly increased when they received help with their problems. What remains a real test for our society is that do we understand that even if we can provide help for the young person, it does not always make them able

to work or study. We should measure our public services by how they increase well-being and strengthen self-esteem and self-worth, as well as generate trust in a just society.

Interviews with young people told clearly who we should support the most. Those young people whose well-being, mentally or otherwise, has decreased should be our priority, and the help should reach them early enough, ideally in childhood. The young people interviewed could also describe one very characteristic flaw in our youth services. The Youth Guarantee appears to rely on guiding young people on a certain time frame as if everything will collapse if a person has to wait. In Finland this time frame is three months. The young people interviewed for the study had a trajectory outside education or employment alternating from a couple of years to 15 years. These young people related that they are guided and counselled again and again. (Gretschel & Myllyniemi 2020, 81–84.)

The question arises: when is it time to take a break and accept the responsibility to see the young person's life as a whole? To see that a person gets the right kind of health and rehabilitation services and does not get punished economically if they are not able to study or work. Young people in this study felt that the public services could help, but that it took too many failed attempts and predetermined processes that were under pressure from time and economics.

One must ask after reading this incredibly important study: have we, as a society and as public policy providers, lost an ability to take an individual's situation into consideration? Young people remind us that sanctions do not work if we do not know what is wrong and why a person is not able to study or work. A young person themselves might not know what kind of help they need. The best way forward is to really listen and then provide those health or other services that really can help and increase well-being. Forcing young people towards education and employment when they are not ready is a risk that society takes too easily, but is one that only hurts our vulnerable young people more.

George Bernard Shaw famously quoted: "*Youth is wasted on the young.*" I definitely do not support this cruel view; quite to the contrary in fact. To me, youth is the most precious time of one's life. I am extremely worried about how the Covid-19 epidemic and the resulting restrictions will affect young people and how we, as a society, are able to support and alleviate the most vulnerable youth.

3.5 Mentoring – why, how and where

In the *Mentoring NEETs* project, our objective is to develop a mentoring model that can work as a preventive and supportive service for young people somewhere along their journey as a young person measuring their options and resources.

Originally, mentoring was a process, in which somebody with more experience shared their knowledge with a less experienced person. In this scenario, the role of an actor is more passive. In the *Mentoring NEETs* project, our approach is more active for both parties and mentoring is based on good and free-flowing communication. Ideally, mentoring is a process in which both parties can learn from each other and find new ways of thinking. Learning to see the world through the eyes of a young person can be especially rewarding for a mentor.

When mentoring a young person, it is important to keep an open mind and understand that everyone has a different stance and unique situation. It is natural for youngsters to feel insecure about the future and not yet be able to see their own potential. On the other hand, a young person can have specific interests and goals, but no real knowledge of how to achieve them. It is important to accept that a young person is as incomplete and as unique a human being as we all are. Our aim in mentoring is a shared understanding between a mentor and an actor.

The role of a mentor is to be a reliable adult who listens and is interested in what is going on in the young person's life. A mentor provides a situation in which an actor can identify their potential and therefore evaluate different kinds of options regarding, for example, education. This is achieved by good and honest communication. In mentoring, the pace is set by an actor. A mentor can give their advice and input, but not make any pre-defined conclusions.

Each country participating in the *Mentoring NEETs* project has its own practices to facilitate mentoring, which are dependent on the social and administrative structure in the participating countries of Finland, Poland and Bulgaria. In Finland, we cooperate with the public sector, schools and other projects and NGOs. Different methods and tools can be used during mentoring. But it is important not to make the whole process too goal-oriented, because that might lead to negative feelings. Positive affirmation from a mentor towards an actor is essential and helps a young person to realize their potential. Relating examples of how a mentor has managed difficult situations can give a young person a new perspective.

3.6 Some suggestions on how to approach mentoring

- before the mentoring session, it is good to empty your mind from all everyday worries, so that you are ready to really listen and be present in the moment. Ask questions when you are not sure, because this way you avoid misunderstandings;
- be positive and affirm positive thinking. It is essential to give opportunities for success;

- be patient, because the change takes time. Don't rush things. Sometimes it is enough to be there without saying a word;
- a mentor does not mean being an expert. It is important not to set yourself above an actor. Mentoring is an equal relationship;
- both an actor and a mentor have their own history and life experience and both are still in a working process as human beings. Enjoy the differences and give each other a chance to learn from the other;
- be open-minded and don't judge;
- the best result of mentoring is if both the mentor and the actor come to new realizations about things and life. But this is not necessary: a successful mentoring process is really about two people communicating at a meaningful level (see Picture 1).



Picture 1. Building blocks for a successful mentoring process. (Vappu Myllärinen, 2021)

3.7 Conclusion

It is my absolute belief that mentoring, as a preventive and low threshold service based on voluntary work, will work in Finnish society. Our willingness to uphold the Nordic welfare state should not exclude voluntary work and should recognize where it fits in our service system. There are always cracks in any system, especially one that deals with human emotions and actions. I hold Finnish youth workers and the Finnish educational system in great esteem, but there is always room for humane interaction that is not guided by law or by pedagogical principals. In my personal experience, what many young people need and want is gentle support and understanding, a dialogue without expectations and judgements. This is something a safe adult, who is willing to give their time volunteering as a mentor, can give to those young people whose hopes and fears might not otherwise be heard. The best end-result of mentoring, in my opinion, is for a young person to find their voice and courage, so that they are able to formulate what it is that they need right now for their well-being. Our whole society benefits if we have preventive services that lessen the need for more intrusive means.

Lastly, I want to voice my steadfast support for young people, especially those who at the present moment are neither studying nor working. As Anu Gretschel's and Sami Myllyniemi's study shows, we have young people who have many well-being concerns other than education or work. They have every right to feel full members of our society and to access services that increase their self-worth and well-being. Mentoring, like any supportive human interaction, can strengthen one's self-esteem, and lay the foundation for finding one's place in this world.

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4 THE PRINCIPLES OF WORKING WITH NEET YOUTH

Damian Liszka & Paweł Walawender

The aim of this paper is to describe and evaluate the opinions of youth workers in the Lesser Poland voivodeship of Poland on working with NEET (not in employment, education, or training) young people. Since this category of young people has very rarely been studied in Poland previously to 2014, it seems justified to conduct research on working with the unemployed, on those youth not participating in any form of formal or vocational education, and on individuals working in practice with NEET clients. Despite lacking the possibility of extrapolating the research results (qualitative research with targeted selection), much information was obtained that may become an inspiration for new research problems and research hypotheses in the future. The research results consist of the opinions of respondents on:

- who mentoring could suit;
- the attitude of NEETs to institutions and “school” learning;
- the recruitment of young people in the category;
- the motivation of youth and trust issues during individual work;
- developing the bond between youth worker and NEET client;
- applying a flexible and realistic approach in individual work;
- working with clients with mental disorders;
- motivation of young people in group work;
- group integration and further group work;
- using new tools in work with NEET youth.

Moreover, some main research findings were used to develop a list of principles or set of guidelines for working with NEET youth that could be treated as a theoretical frame for youth workers.

4.1 Research context

Using the IDI technique (individual in-depth interview), respondents’ opinions on the products of the project entitled *Mentoring NEETs – an innovative form of personal counselling supporting educational and professional activation of NEET youth*, as well as the developed assumptions of the model of individual and group mentoring designed for NEET youth,

were obtained from 35 youth workers at the Social Research Laboratory of the Pedagogical University of Kraków in the period between 12 November 2019 and November 27 2019. Additionally, thanks to the method of inference used in the field of social sciences (treating people's statements as indicators of specific opinions and attitudes), the conducted research made it possible to draw additional conclusions on: 1) the recruitment of young people in the NEET category in the Lesser Poland voivodeship of Poland, 2) the approach of youth workers to NEETs during individual work and 3) the approach of youth workers to NEETs during group work. This study considers the reflections that are not related to the project's products, but refer to opinions resulting from the professional experience possessed by the respondents, including working with people of NEET status. An analysis of the material collected from the IDI research was carried out in the period from 18 August 2020 to 21 October 2020.

Research in the Lesser Poland voivodeship, the results of which are described in this study, can be treated as a pilot and exploratory study, aimed at obtaining information that in the future may become an inspiration for new research problems and research hypotheses, mainly concerning working with young people who are unemployed, uneducated and not in some form of training.

4.2 The NEET category in research

The "NEET" acronym refers to an individual who is not employed, not participating in the education system, and who does not participate in additional training courses. Previously to 2014, in strategic documents on the labour market in the European Union (EU) as well as in similar documents in Poland, NEET young people were usually accepted to be those in the age range from 15 to 24-years-old. However, it is worth noting that, as a rule, with the exception of Anglo-Saxon countries, the NEET phenomenon has not been analysed both at the level of EU strategic documents and the labour market policies of individual member states (cf. Liszka & Walawender 2018; Szcześniak & Rondón 2011). Currently, in Poland, Statistics Poland (GUS) defines the group of people aged 15–34 as "young people" (Statistics Poland. Statistical Office in Gdańsk 2017). A longer period of education is often indicated as the reason for the shifting of the upper age limit of young people over 25 in Poland (Grotowska-Leder 2018; Saczyńska-Sokół & Łojko, 2016), as well as the increasingly later economic independence of young people (Nagel 2013).

In relation to defining the age range of NEET young people, there were also numerous differences between individual EU members, e.g. the following ranges were adopted: 16–24 in Austria, 15–34 in Romania, and 15–24 in Ireland (Liszka & Walawender 2018). The lowest age limit that has been most often taken into account in the analyses of international

institutions, in scientific papers, and in government reports, is 15 years of age. As for the highest upper limit, it has been as much as 39 years of age (RynekPracy.org, 2018).

Both at the EU level and, consequently, also in the member states, including Poland, practical initiatives have been taken in the labour market field aimed at reducing the number of individuals in the NEET category. In December 2012, the Youth Employment Package was developed, part of which was the Youth Guarantee (YG) initiative, i.e. a postulate addressed to EU member states to provide NEET young people up to 25 years of age with an offer of employment, further education, apprenticeship or internship within 4 months from the end of their formal education or unemployment, or from the date of their participation in the project or registration at an employment office. The European Council adopted a recommendation on the establishment of the YG on 22 April 2013 (2013 C 120/01), obliging member states to implement them (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Infrastructure and Development 2015).

The YG initiative originally targeted only young people up to 25 years of age, although the percentage of NEETs at the level of the 28 EU countries in the 15–17 and 18–24 age groups was significantly lower than in the 25–29 age group (in 2013, when the YG was adopted, it was, respectively 2.7% in the 15–17 age group; 17.1% in the 18–24 group; and 22.7% in the 25–29 age group). As the EU had left the option for clarifying the rules for implementing the YG in any given country up to the member states, as many as 17 out of 28 countries that had implemented the initiative before 2017 increased the upper age limit to over 25 (Liszka & Walawender, 2018). Thus, the above initiative had a certain impact in the years 2014–2020 on the standardization of the adopted age range for NEET young people in the EU member states, including Poland.

Among the addressees of YG in Poland, it was decided to distinguish four subgroups:

- 1) Individuals aged 15–17 – early school leavers
- 2) Individuals aged 18–29 who remained outside the labour force, education and training (NEET)
- 3) Individuals aged 18–29 registered as unemployed
- 4) Unemployed youth, as well as job-seekers, school and university graduates within 48 months of graduating from school or obtaining a professional title, aged 18–29 (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Infrastructure and Development 2015).

It is also worth emphasizing that the adopted division into subgroups was intended to distinguish proposed activation measures in relation to those individuals aged 15–17 leaving educa-

tion early, who neglected compulsory education, or training, and focused solely on providing support leading to study or training; or to acquire professional qualifications by participating in qualifying vocational courses and acquiring elementary social competences, i.e. without the possibility of taking up employment, from activities aimed at people aged 18–29 (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Infrastructure and Development 2015).

As data on the NEET indicator had not been previously presented by official Polish statistics, since 2014, Statistics Poland (GUS) has begun activities aimed at estimating the size of the NEET group for the following age categories: 15–24, 15–29 and 25–29 at the voivodeship level (NTS 2) (Statistics Poland 2015). Changes also took place in the area of labour market policies in Poland, since previously to 2014, activation measures included unemployed young people under the age of 25, the amendment to the Act on employment promotion and labour market institutions and some other acts of March 14, 2014 (Act 2014) also specified aid instruments addressed to people up to 30 years of age (Saczyńska-Sokół & Łojko, 2016). Young people (including NEETs) in the age range from 15 to 29 (after their 15th birthday and before the age of 30) were accepted for the purposes of carrying out IDI research with youth workers in the Lesser Poland voivodeship.

4.3 Methodological assumptions of the research and characteristics of the research sample

Individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) (Dzięglewski 2019) with 35 youth workers were carried out between 12 and 27 November 2019 in the Social Research Lab of the Pedagogical University of Kraków (currently Research and Innovation Center “InLAB”). Before the start of the interviews, the qualified respondents had had 14 days to familiarize themselves with the products of the project (web site, e-learning courses, tools created for NEET mentoring) as well as the developed assumptions of the model of individual and group mentoring designed for NEET youth (including model presentation, sample scenarios for individual and group sessions, advice for mentors).

The IDI technique is one of the qualitative methods in social research, as opposed to quantitative methods such as surveys which use standardized questionnaires and conduct research on large samples. The interview was based on a partially structured non-questionnaire discussion guide, which (according to methodological standards) signifies that the moderator did not have to ask questions in the same order as in the guide, nor formulate them literally as written in the scenario (sample questions asked during IDIs: To what extent do you think the content can be useful for people who work with young people looking for new solutions?; Would you change anything in the content? If so what and how?; How do you rate the tools that have been made available?; Do you have any advice for the future

mentor on how to talk to the participants for the first time?; How to “break the ice” in group work?). Interview moderators were contractors trained in such a way as to ensure full comfort for the respondents, and the interview was to be conducted in such a way that the respondent had the impression that he or she had participated in a conversation.

IDI participants were deliberately selected, which means that they were not a statistical representation of any population. In the study covered by this publication, the population was adult (i.e. 18 years of age or more on the day of the study), living in the Lesser Poland voivodeship of Poland, and employed for a period of at least 6 months with adolescents and young people (i.e. people aged 15 to 29) residing in this voivodeship. The term “work” is understood as various forms of activities and initiatives undertaken for the benefit of young people in the indicated age range, so this term should be understood broadly as equivalent to the term “activity” and includes both work under employment contracts, civil law contracts, voluntary work and other forms of contact with the target group.

Each respondent was obliged to demonstrate professional experience in working with people in the NEET category, in accordance with the adopted definition as described in the section above. The period of employment, as well as confirmation of experience in activities for NEET category individuals aged 15–29, were verified through the personal declarations of the candidates in the study. The average period of employment of the respondents comprised of young people, calculated in months, and amounted to approximately 69 months; the least being 9 months and the most 360 months (i.e. 25 years).

Recruitment for the study was carried out using publicly available lists of public institutions, commercial companies, non-governmental organizations and cultural institutions to which an invitation to participate in the project was sent. In addition, people who applied to participate were asked to convey information about the research to other individuals who met the participation criteria and could potentially be interested in participating in the interviews (the so-called “snowball sampling method” was used).

The participants constituted a group diversified in terms of basic socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, profession, place of residence.

Thirty-five people took part in the research, including 25 women and 10 men. The vast majority of participants (33 people) had tertiary education with at least a bachelor’s degree (ISCED 5–8). Only one respondent had at most a post-secondary (ISCED 4) and one had post-lower secondary (ISCED 3) education. The youngest participant in the research was 21-years-old, while the oldest was 47-years-old (the average age was 34). The majority of people participating in the IDIs were city residents (29 people), the majority were inhabit-

ants of Kraków (24 people, which constituted almost 69% of participants), and six people lived in the rural areas or in one of the smaller towns in the Lesser Poland voivodeship.

Assumptions regarding the selection of the research sample provided for participation in the study were such categories of respondents as employed, working under civil law contracts, self-employed, and volunteers. Attempts were also made to attract respondents working with young people in various forms, e.g. as part of formal, non-formal, or informal education; or also as part of social, professional or educational activation programmes; or social inclusion or addiction prevention, personal development, and cultural education. Likewise, because of the location of their interaction with young people (see Table no. 1), the assumptions provided for the selection of various respondents, i.e. people operating in various entities (public, private, NGO, support groups).

The group of respondents included career counsellors, personal trainers, soft skills trainers, coaches, mentors, psychotherapists, volunteers in associations and foundations working with youth, entertainment managers and educators of formal and informal groups, staff of social assistance and integration institutions, labour market institutions, training institutions, employment offices, the Voluntary Labour Corps, and judicial institutions. Thanks to such a diversity of research participants, learning the opinions of respondents from very different perspectives was made possible.

Table No. 1. Structure of IDI participants by location of working with young people

Workplace	Number of people
Public institution – social support centre	6
Public institution – labour market support centre	2
Public institution – other areas of activity *	3
Non-governmental organization – foundation	13
Non-governmental organization – association	6
Commercial enterprise – training and professional activation institution	4
Commercial enterprise – addiction therapy centre	1
Overall	35

* 1 person – library, 1 person – court, 1 person – university

After the interviews, 35 text transcriptions had been obtained that have been used for conducting in-deep data analyses by the desk research method. The data analysis took place from August until October 2020 (by the authors). The desk research technique is

known as a secondary research method. It consists of analysing the existing data and then formulating conclusions regarding the problem under study. In this research method, primary data is not generated, for example, as part of an interview with respondents, but secondary research is carried out by analysing the existing primary data. The advantage of this method is the use of available data, which significantly reduces the cost of the study as well as the problem of obtaining primary data. On the other hand, the disadvantages of this method include the lack of control over the data acquisition process itself, which may lead to the fact that not all data subjected to the data analysis process can be used due to their quality (gaps in existing data).

4.4 Whom could mentoring suit?

The statements of the research participants demonstrate that they positively assessed the idea of working with young people in the NEET category, and also in the form of individual and group mentoring carried out using the “facilitated mentoring” method (Lacey 2000), based on a mentoring programme with specific goals and time frames in accordance with the principles of implementation adopted in a given organization, as a tool supporting the process of professional and social activation of these young people. Moreover, it was emphasized that a mentor supporting the development process of a given person should, as a rule, be perceived positively by such a person, guaranteeing safety for the young person and providing him or her with the necessary feedback. The participants indicated that for NEETs, a mentor or guardian who would support the development of a young person and who showed interest in the fate of this person and provided support that NEET youth may not have received from parents or legal guardians, might have a positive effect on the process of acquiring NEET participants for a given programme or project. Below are sample statements from IDI participants:

R: We endeavour to make kids feel that they are important, but in their homes it is different, so additionally showing them that their opinions matter and that they have an impact on what is happening around them, is crucial for them. [R10, a woman working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

R: (...) I have also had such nice experiences, years ago, when I was faced with working with a group of young people, I knew that these were people, maybe not on the edge, but difficult youth. And at the moment I arrived, I greeted them, held out my hand to them, they were so shocked that some old woman has come and that she is normal. (...) [R11, a woman working with young people in a public entity dealing with the professional activation of young people]

4.5 The attitude of NEETs to institutions and “school”

The participants in the research emphasized the reluctance of young people to the forms of institutional assistance and, consequently, to officials working within given institutions (for example, in public employment offices). According to the respondents, such reluctance might result from the approach of people working in such offices to young people, which is not based on encouragement, but on an attempt to impose on the client a given outlook on life. The IDI participants expressed the opinion that any attempt by an official to impose certain attitudes or expectations on young people might be perceived as an attempt to dominate. This, in turn, might affect the reluctance of a NEET person to join a given support programme offered by an institution or agency. Here, according to the respondents, the advantage of mentoring can be seen as activities based on the effect of encouragement, open friendly conversation, and not on compulsion to take a given action (such as finding a job, undertaking training). Young people, according to the opinions of the research participants, may also be reluctant to agree to the fixed hours of support that are set in advance, imposed by institutions, without taking into account a client’s preferences; or some flexibility consisting in arranging a convenient meeting time with the client, for example, outside office hours. The following statements of people working with young people both in public entities and in non-governmental organizations indicate the resistance of young people to institutional support and to officials:

R: (...) A completely different approach than presented, than is usually discussed, because everyone is more focused on guiding these children, these young people. And here it is precisely this, about being a companion, but making room for these young people to develop themselves. [R19, a woman working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

R: I think, something like this is needed, to take it “with a grain of salt,” not like in an institution ... I have these young people who don’t want to go anywhere. They don’t like the officials. [R23, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

R: (...) This doesn’t surprise me anymore, but many people are very surprised when they read that meetings are organized when THEY want, not just during “office hours,” such things for many people are very revealing, for me they are not. [R26, a man working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

R: (...) For someone who is constantly being controlled, under pressure, trying to be influenced, until finally they put such a person in a closed facility, so if there was such an institution [ed. – mentor], who could somehow lead them out of these difficulties, could have some kind of influence on them, it would be very good. [R35, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of justice]

Employees of public institutions operating in the field of social support emphasize that there are even situations in which the resistance of NEETs towards the employees of an institution may take the form of aggression:

R: When they see a social worker, sometimes unpleasant things come their way, they work, because they have to do so, they have such indicators of work and it does not get across to young people, it does not appeal to them, and sometimes it works the other way around so that they are aggressive towards such people. [R23, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

R: (...) However, affected by certain pathologies, we encounter a large amount of aggression and anger, so that is why I said at the beginning that for me there are such NEETs, those with whom we work. [R26, a man working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

One respondent pointed out that in his opinion, NEET young people may show resistance to forms of support that will remind them of their formal education at school, based on the acquisition of “textbook” and theoretical knowledge, and then its verification. This form of learning can even demotivate young people when it comes to joining a given support programme. Mentoring, in the opinion of the IDI research participant, may be an adequate response to the reluctance of young people to learn at school, as it is based on an informal relationship between a youth worker and the participant, which can be supported by any work tools, such as multimedia materials, digital platforms, team games or outdoor workshops. Here is the respondent’s statement:

R: (...) It is precisely my experience of working with children and those who are not too motivated to learn, to somehow change it, and I can actually see that it somehow attracts them, these things which are indeed abnormal, they are not just standard, textbook, school staff. Because when something is school-related, they immediately run away from it. [R03, a woman working with young people in an NGO – association]

4.6 Recruitment of NEET young people

According to several participants of the IDI research, a major obstacle in acquiring NEET youth is a lack of knowledge on the part of the institution's staff on the methods of effective recruitment of young people who are not studying, training or working. Even organizations statutorily focused on supporting this category of young people in Poland have difficulties in recruiting a client in the NEET category for a given support programme or initiative. This problem with recruitment is indicated by the following statements of employees in public institutions:

R: (...) However, when looking at companies that carry out all kinds of projects for young people, for example, I indeed have the pleasure of knowing a person who is implementing one of the EU projects, actually dedicated to young people, not in education, professionally inactive. (...) This acquaintance said that at the beginning, he had never dreamed that he would be able to recruit these people for the project in such a way, that the recruitment methods that he thought were great, in practice turned out to be rubbish. [R1], a woman working with youth in a public entity dealing with the professional activation]

R: First and foremost, they did not know where to get the participants from, because they dealt with education and activation, but they did not care who would come to them and from where. Secondly, if these participants came to them, they were actually bombarded with these courses, rather not courses, but with such activation games, so that at least they would mutually come out of their shell and so on; thus half of the people drop out then and there and never show up anymore. [R26, a man working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

As a rule, the respondents' statements did not identify adequate recruitment methods which, in their opinion, could be considered effective in recruiting NEETs for support programmes. The exception is the statement of one respondent who works as a so-called "street worker."¹ This respondent emphasized that when planning to recruit a NEET client, one should drop the belief that young people will come to the institution themselves. On the other hand, in her opinion, measures relying on the personal recruitment of participants in places where they gather are effective. This is indicated by the following statement of the respondent:

¹ "Street-working" is a method of working with children and young people, which consists of initiating the first contact in the field – in places where young people are (including housing estates, squares, playing fields, etc.).

R: (...) I think that if someone comes by themselves, they are not really NEET youth. (...) We work with young people who are not looking for assistance, who do not want this help, they do not need it. It seems that they do not need the help, and they are not coming for it and will not come to us when we ourselves do not go to them. (...) We work with young people, who you just have to approach by yourself, walk around neighbourhoods, sit in some stairwells, and so on. And it seems to me that these are the real NEET youths who are the most in need, and it seems to me that all other things seem to miss this target. [R26, a man working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

4.7 Motivation of NEET youth and trust issues during individual work

The participants in the IDI research shared their comments on, in their opinion, the essential, elements of individual work with a NEET client, that is, when a youth worker interacts with one young person.

A lack of motivation of NEETs to co-operate or participate in a given project was most frequently noticed by the respondents working with youth and young people. The lack of motivation was also often described by the respondents as “resistance” or as a “barrier.” The ability to properly motivate the NEET client was mentioned as an important competence of the youth worker. Four respondents expressed the opinion that without the use of appropriate techniques and methods of motivation, effective co-operation with a young person who was out of work as well as outside the education system was not possible. Below are the statements of individuals working with young people in non-governmental organizations, drawing attention to this problem:

R: (...) Perhaps we assume that the project will involve people who are motivated enough that this resistance will be minimal, but this resistance may also arise if we try to meet some goals or implement them. [R01, a man working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

R: What one person says to another, also, motivating them: such elements were specific examples, specific methods, specific techniques. [R02, a woman working with young people in an NGO – association]

When asked about the other problems of young people, participants of the IDI research often mentioned distrust towards youth workers. They emphasized that building trust by discussing the rules of confidentiality is an element of work that should appear at the first contact with a NEET young person. Ensuring the confidentiality of information obtained from the client and gaining the trust of this young person is crucial in further work. The following are examples of statements where respondents indicated confidentiality aspects:

R: Teenagers, young adults often have such cognitive distortions... Some kind of black and white thinking. (...) Or a security plan that, for example, when something happens, the participant, for example, reports violence during these interviews, or reports a depressed mood, or declares that they have been abusing a substance for some time. [R02, a woman working with young people in an NGO – association]

R: There was a lot of emphasis, for example, on the atmosphere in the group, on the first group meeting and the first individual meeting, and I actually see it as very important to start well and build this trust and an atmosphere conducive to later work and some opening up of the people, so this particular emphasis seems to me to be absolutely necessary. [R04, a woman working with young people in an NGO – association]

Two respondents working with young people in a public entity in the area of social assistance were emphasizing the key issue of confidentiality during meetings with the client, and also mentioned the possibility of an ethical dilemma when working with young people:

R: (...) They also know that they can talk to us about everything and not everything will be passed along, in the sense that we do not convey all the content. (...) We will also not report them to the police, for example, that they are doing something or that they are contemplating doing something. [R23, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

R: (...) Because if later, God forbid, something will come out somewhere at some later stage and ... "I told you this because I trusted you," for example, "I didn't want it to go any further." [R25, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

4.8 Developing the bond between youth worker and NEET client

IDI respondents emphasized that in addition to discussing confidentiality rules, a key element during the first meeting with a NEET young person is the introduction of a youth worker. Only when the employee introduces themselves can one expect the same from his or her client on a reciprocal basis. Below are some examples of statements presenting such attitudes of people working with youth in a public institution, commercial entity, and non-governmental organization:

R: About the first conversation, the meeting. (...) (...) It would never occur to not mention confidentiality right away, to not say something about oneself. [R07, a woman working with young people in an NGO – association]

R: I also liked the mentoring experience very much, sharing the experience of mentoring seems to me to have a great impact, and a conversation or trust at the first contact. [R08, a woman working with young people in a commercial entity operating in the field of education]

R: At the first meeting there should be no framework, no script. The mentor should build trust and establish contact with young people, build a bond. [R24, a man working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

Many respondents emphasized that while building trust between the client and the youth worker is crucial during the first individual meeting, the bond with the NEET young person should also be developed later, i.e. during the entire co-operation process in a given programme or activity. This is indicated by the following statements from IDI participants:

R: (...) Introducing this person, making them familiar with people, building trust. I think it may be difficult for them to call certain emotions, feelings. [R18, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of education]

R: Here I see some patterns, even the usual ones. So, individual meetings creating a bond with the trainer (...). [R21, a man working with young people in a commercial entity in the field of education]

One of the ways to develop a bond with a NEET young person may be to tell the youth worker about their professional and social adventures, life experiences, ups and downs, as indicated by the statements of two IDI participants:

R: The same goes for entering the specifics of individual contact. What is it to be based on, because here indications are too vague that we will talk about what someone likes or dislikes, without even touching the topic of the past in the sense of professional experience. What was easy, what was difficult at different stages of education, or different challenges here? [R0], a man working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

R: (...) Usually during work I present a lot about myself and I sometimes think, "God, it makes no sense," but I think that it allows for such better effectiveness in action and increasing the motivation of the other person, that saying that sometimes something failed, that I sometimes also don't know how to do something, or actually that I have succeeded, or that I could arise, or that I used to do things in their entirety, and now I am at this moment of my life, not another, which is also, teaching me. [R17, a woman working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

Another way to build a bond with a young person, in the opinion of several respondents, may be organizing activities that will allow the NEET client to obtain information about themselves, clarify knowledge and self-reflection. According to IDI participants, children and young people pay a lot of attention to themselves, their feelings, appearance and plans. One way to use such an attitude positively may be to involve the NEET client in various competency and predisposition tests (for example, in the field of social or professional competencies). Below are some examples of statements in which research participants point to these aspects:

R: I am a psychologist, so I also know a bit from working with children, with young people (...), so I think that it is also very important at such a developmental age for young people that they see something, that they will draw something, think about something a little. Such feedback from oneself to oneself. [R02, a woman working with young people in an NGO – association]

R: (...) Let's take tests for social competences and develop them, because they are also needed when working with youth, especially with difficult youth. [R15, a man working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

One of the IDI participants pointed out that another form of activity that allows one to exploit the “narcissistic” attitude of children and adolescents may be the organization of activities based on the client’s interests and passions:

R: (...) There are young people who are specifically interested in some things, so they can specify it to such an extent that they can show something, a type of such typically thematic activities. Where we would have to learn about photography in order to inspire these young people towards a specific topic. [R35, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of justice]

4.9 A flexible and realistic approach in individual work

Selected research participants also indicated other aspects of working with young people, conducive to building relationships with the client and gaining their trust. There was often an opinion that the key issue was the individual approach to each person and the flexible adjustment of meeting times to the needs and capabilities of that particular person. This is indicated by the following statements:

R: (...) The duration of the meetings should also be adjusted individually to each person. It takes a long time to reach some people, some are very distrustful of adults and discouraged from supporting them in any way. [R24, a man working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

R: (...) I never have a script on how to talk to Kasia, Basia, Marzena [ed. – Polish names], but if I approach each of them individually and not all things that will work for me with Kasia, will work for me with Bartuś, or Maciek [ed. – other Polish names] there so it’s also ... [R25, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

Among the respondents’ statements, there were also indications of the need to realistically formulate goals set for the NEET client:

R: (...) We have an individual approach, we listen to what our charges say, we ask open questions rather than closed ones, we ask them about their context of behaviour and we try to give the most realistic achievable goals, not somewhere in a textbook, what is worth achieving in life. [R15, a man working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

R: (...)Young people associate goals with institutions: schools have a goal – to pass the secondary school-leaving examination, there is an emphasis on them, when they go to a technical school, the goal is to obtain a profession, pass an exam, etc. [R24, a man working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

On the other hand, several participants in the IDI research expressed the belief that it is difficult to work with NEET youth troubled by mental disorders. In the opinion of the respondents, a youth worker should individually assess whether it is possible to co-operate with the client or whether they need a specialist's assistance, for example, from a psychiatrist or psychologist. This is also related to the self-assessment of the competences of the youth worker. This is indicated by the statements of people active in non-governmental organizations:

R: (...) We have to be aware of our knowledge and if an individual needs the help of a specialist, psychologist, psychiatrist, then we have to bring such a person there. [R33, a woman working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

R: All kinds of things are happening and there are various NEETs, so here I don't know, maybe some form of contact would be helpful? And let's say some kind of support from a psychologist or someone who this mentor can call and consult on the matter. [R34, a woman working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

4.10 Motivation of NEET youth in group work

IDI participants also expressed views on relevant elements during the organization of NEET group meetings by youth workers, that is, those involving the youth worker and more than one young person.

IDI respondents primarily focused on the reluctance of the NEET client to work in a group, or the lack of motivation of these individuals to work in a group. This reluctance was often described by respondents as “resistance.” According to the research participants, this “resistance” is a serious challenge for the trainer who conducts group activities and an inexperienced person may have problems eliminating it. Such an opinion was expressed by employees of public institutions and people acting in non-governmental organizations. Here are statements highlighting this issue:

R: The question is, do we take people who are motivated here, or do we round up these people from some other projects, "it would be useful for you, so come in and I'll tell you" and the NEET may not be motivated. [R23, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

R: (...) There is something – pessimism at the beginning, but when they involved themselves in it, then, "wow, it was great," (...) [R25, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

The experience of a youth worker in conducting group activities with NEETs may, in the opinion of selected respondents, be of key importance due to the differences between a particular workshop's groups. The following statements indicate the importance of experience and the need for an individual approach to each group:

R: Maybe because I also preside over groups, and I also work individually, so I have such experience that I have to come up with a lot of creative ideas and also use various others that already exist, but in such an intensive form. [R04, a woman working with young people in an NGO – association]

R: (...) It is impossible to predict every scenario, since working with young people is quite dynamic here, because depending on the people you encounter, you have to adapt everything, materials and some methods of operation. [R21, a man working with young people in a commercial entity in the field of education]

R: (...) In my opinion, it is never the case where one can develop one model that will be perfect for everything, because when working with people, everyone is different and here you have to take into account that such a mentor will certainly encounter various things. [R22, a woman working with young people in a commercial entity in the field of education]

4.11 The importance of group integration

The respondents also expressed their opinions on the organization of the initial stage of the youth worker working with a given group. IDI participants most often emphasized that the integration of participants is very important at the beginning of group work with youth and young people. Integration is aimed at getting acquainted with each other, exchanging information about oneself, building trust in relation to other group members. This is indicated by the following statements of the respondents:

R: (...) When it comes to breaking the ice ... It was about group work at the very beginning, because I suspect that these people aren't familiar with each other and they have to work together, that is, they have to ... It would be nice if the climate was nice when they work with each other, also it has a lot to do with individual work as well. [R12, a woman working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

R: (...) Just like at the very beginning, when there are meetings in a group, it's nice to do some integration games (...). It seems to me that the group should initially integrate, and only then can we get into certain descriptions and so on, because we must first like each other, and if we do not like someone, we do not want to hear what they have to say. [R14, a woman working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

When asked about the recommended ways in which a youth worker can conduct group integration activities, IDI respondents indicated tools in the form of group integration games, these so-called ice breakers. It was most often emphasized that during the integration stage, one should use such games that present the similarities between group members, and not the differences between them. Such games are, for example: “What character would I be?” (“What animal would I be?”) or the “Similarities” game. This is indicated by the following statements about integration through group games:

R: (...) So, tools that would only apply to the group's warm-up, so-called “ice breakers.” Tools that help to reduce resistance. [R01, a man working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

R: For example, maybe just as a warm-up, or at one of the first sessions of a group, truly imagining the drill “What character would I be?”, “What animal would I be?” (...). [R04, a woman working with young people in an NGO – association]

R: (...) Earlier, when I worked with young people up to the age of 18, we did more integration games, for example, similar to this game, the “Similarities” game, that someone says something about themselves and everyone gets up and approaches this person because, I don't know, maybe their hobbies are the same or are similar to it. [R23, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

One of the respondents also mentioned the game entitled “Marshmallow Challenge” as suitable for the first youth integration group activities:

R: (...) “Marshmallow Challenge” or something like that, where they have a marshmallow and twenty marshmallow straws, spaghetti, a piece of string and in groups they have to build on the table, in say, twenty minutes, the highest tower and so on; at this moment, I think it would be an interesting task for such a first group meeting, as it stimulates creativity, but does not require any school competences, so even someone who felt underestimated in formal education may suddenly turn out to be creative in this type of challenge, or in different simple games, so familiar to me. [R15, a man working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

4.12 Further group work

The respondents also mentioned tools useful for group work with NEETs after the group integration stage. The tools cited by the research participants also included team games. According to IDI participants, this is because of their informal nature, which is not associated with school or the academic transfer of knowledge by youth and young people. The respondents also pointed to another positive aspect of team games – shaping the ability to work in a group and collaborate in teams. This is indicated by the following statements:

R: (...) Then [ed. – after the end of integration] group activities that also allow the participants to co-operate with each other. [R21, a man working with young people in a commercial entity in the field of education]

R: (...) Whenever I conduct a workshop, I try to do it in such a way as to work out some things together, which will also give them the job opportunities later, or if they leave these workshops, they will know what to do, as if they arrive at it themselves as if I'm not instilling it in them, that they don't come just for a talk, but rather for group classes, based on creating something together. [R25, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

Some IDI participants indicated examples of team games which, in their opinion, work best with young people. Three of the respondents indicated games based on playing social roles or theatre scenes. An example of such a game is “Mini Chamber”:

R (...) On the others [ed. – after the integration classes], when the group is already more integrated, when the work is going further, everyone is more open, it would be possible to go a step further with it, for example to do role playing. [R04, a woman working with young people in an NGO – association]

R: (...) So what I would be looking for are more developed or complicated scenarios, so that it would be a game of, say, “Mini Chamber,” in which we get some roles to play and goals to achieve... [R15, a man working with young people in a non-governmental organization – foundation]

One respondent mentioned the usefulness of creative team games, where participants work together to create new items or perform specific manual activities:

R: (...) An egg was used at other courses we conducted, where the egg has to be wrapped ... the participants in the groups accept the egg, along with a set of materials, of which there is very little, and they have to wrap the egg in such a way that they can drop it from a height of two metres and not break the egg. Solving very physical tasks in a group, we have such a challenge and we will see if we will succeed, developing the competence of creative thinking and working in a group, because it is always better in a group without saying “And we now will discuss when will you finally find work”. [R15, a man working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

IDI participants also positively assessed group gamification workshops, leading to the creation of new digital products by NEETs:

R: The “MATTI” project [ed. – “MATTI – Men’s Journey to Work” (S20747) realized from 2016 to 2018 in Finland] – I really liked that innovative idea of developing a computer game, so I think it was more relevant for this generation than really those traditional, group meetings that sometimes just don’t work that well anymore. They work, but not with each group as efficiently as we would like them to. [R04, a woman working with young people in an NGO – association]

R: (...) For example, I liked these workshops. They are probably developed in Finland... gamification. (...) Yes, I would rate these gamification workshops very positively. [R08, a woman working with young people in a commercial entity operating in the field of education]

4.13 Using new tools in work with NEET youth

Most respondents, when asked about the usefulness of new games or new tools in their work with NEET youth, created, for example, in innovative projects, expressed the opinion that during the interview they were not able to assess the usefulness or non-suitability of such products, because they would first have to “test” or “work through” them. This testing, in the opinion of the respondents, could take the form of testing on a target group of young people unknown to the youth worker, testing on a known group, testing by personal performance of a given game by the worker or “working through” as part of a thought experiment. This is indicated by the following statements of IDI participants:

R: Whether there would be anything useful, it only comes out after working with youth. So at first glance, you can use everything, because it seems interesting. However, whether they will work, it will only emerge when it is tested on the group. [R05, a woman working with young people in a public entity dealing with professional activation of young people]

R: If I were to answer this question honestly [ed. – for the use of new games], I would have to check it in practice. It's hard for me to say now, or at least to write it down as a kind of project carried out in classes. [R06, a man working with young people in an NGO – association]

R: (...) However, I stated that all these tools, I would be delighted to use them, only that I am a person who would have to work with them first ... (...) for my own protection and for the protection of these people ... [R09, a woman working with young people in an NGO – association]

R: I think that when there are similar games, you can imagine, it is usually good to play a game yourself first, to be a participant before you play it and that is also great; therefore, such training is also for future participants, when they also have the opportunity to first experience what they will lead later. [R28, a woman working with young people in a public entity operating in the field of social assistance]

R: (...) Because for some groups there will have something that works, while in some it will not. And then, when we understand more games, we can adapt it to a given group. [R31, a woman working with young people in an NGO – foundation]

The reader can find a summary of comments of youth workers (participants of the IDI research) about, in their opinion, essential elements of work with a NEET client in the table below (see Table no 2).

Table No. 2. Summary (comments of youth workers)

No	Opinion(s)
1	A mentor or guardian who will support the development of a young person and showed interest in the fate of this person and provided support that the NEET youth may not have received from parents or legal guardians, may have a positive effect on the process of acquiring NEET participants for a given programme or project.
2	The advantage of mentoring can be seen as activities based on the effect of encouragement, open friendly conversation, and not compulsion to take a given action (such as finding a job, undertaking training).
3	Young people may be reluctant to agree to the fixed hours of support that are set in advance, without taking into account a client's preferences; or some flexibility consisting in arranging a convenient meeting time with the client, for example, outside office hours.
4	Mentoring may be an adequate response to the reluctance of young people to learn at school, as it is based on an informal relationship between a youth worker and a participant, which can be supported by any work tools, such as multimedia materials, digital platforms, team games or outdoor workshops.
5	A major obstacle in acquiring NEET youth is a lack of knowledge on the part of the institution's staff on the methods of effective recruitment of young people who are not studying, training or working.
6	The ability to properly motivate the NEET client is an important competence of the youth worker. Without the use of appropriate techniques and methods of motivation, effective co-operation with a young person who was out of work as well as outside the education system may not be possible.
7	Building trust by discussing the rules of confidentiality is an element of work that should appear at the first contact with a NEET young person. Ensuring the confidentiality of information obtained from the client and gaining the trust of this young person is crucial in further work.
8	A key element during the first meeting with a NEET young person is the introduction of a youth worker. Only when the employee introduces himself, can one expect the same from his or her client on a reciprocal basis.
9	A bond with the NEET young person should be developed during the entire co-operation process in a given programme or activity.
10	Children and young people pay a lot of attention to themselves, their feelings, appearance and plans. One way to use such an attitude positively may be to involve the NEET client in various competency and predisposition tests (for example, in the field of social or professional competencies). Another is the organization of activities based on the client's interests and passions.
11	The key issue is the individual approach to each person, the flexible adjustment of meeting times to the needs and capabilities of that particular person and the need to realistically formulate goals set for the NEET client.

No	Opinion(s)
12	A youth worker should individually assess whether it is possible to co-operate with the client or whether they need a specialist's assistance, for example, from a psychiatrist or psychologist.
13	The "resistance" to work in a group is a serious challenge for the trainer who conducts group activities and an inexperienced person may have problems eliminating it.
14	The experience of a youth worker in conducting group activities with NEETs may be of key importance due to the differences between a particular workshop's groups.
15	The integration of participants is very important at the beginning of group work with youth and young people. Integration is aimed at getting acquainted with each other, exchanging information about oneself, building trust in relation to other group members.
16	Recommended ways in which a youth worker can conduct group integration activities may be group integration games, so-called ice breakers. One should use such games that present the similarities between group members, and not the differences between them. Such games are, for example: "What character would I be?" ("What animal would I be?"), Marshmallow Challenge, or the "Similarities" game.
17	Tools useful for group work with NEETs after the group integration stage may be team games, because of their informal nature, which is not associated with school or the academic transfer of knowledge by youth and young people. The respondents also pointed to another positive aspect of team games – shaping the ability to work in a group and collaborate in teams. Such games are, for example, games based on playing social roles or theatre scenes (like "Mini Chamber"), creative team games, where participants work together to create new items or perform specific manual activities, or group gamification workshops, leading to the creation of new digital products.
18	Most respondents, when asked about the usefulness of new games or new tools in their work with NEET youth, created, for example, in innovative projects, expressed the opinion that during the interview they were not able to assess the usefulness or non-suitability of such products, because they would first have to "test" or "work through" them.

4.14 Summary

Both at the EU level and, consequently, also in Poland, initiatives are taken in the area of the labour market, aimed at reducing the number of people in the NEET category. These individuals are supported in public organizations, commercial entities and non-governmental organizations. Since this category of young people was very rarely studied in Poland before 2014, it seems justified to conduct research on working with young people who are unemployed, not participating in any form of formal or vocational education, and on people working in practice with NEET clients.

Despite the lack of the possibility of extrapolating the research results (qualitative research with targeted selection), much information was obtained that may become an inspiration for new research problems and research hypotheses in the future. Moreover, some main research findings were used to develop a set of guidelines for working with NEET youth that can be treated as practical advice for youth workers (see Table no 3).

Table No. 3. Research findings and guidelines

Research finding	Guideline
NEET client may not be easy to recruit to a programme/project	When planning to recruit a NEET client, drop the belief that young people will come to the institution themselves – try personal recruitment
NEET client may exhibit aversion to institutions and officials, as well as reluctance to work according to a strictly defined schedule or during so-called “office” hours	Try to be flexible and organize activities based on the interests of youth, with realistic goals achievable by the participant
NEETs may show reluctance to participate in support programmes based on methods used in formal education, consisting of the acquisition of theoretical or “textbook” knowledge and its subsequent validation	Try to use non-formal tools (based on creativity and competences, not acquisition and validation of theoretical knowledge)
After recruiting a young person who is not in education, training or any form of work he/she could manifest “resistance” to work, lack of motivation and distrust	Try to motivate and support the client during the whole programme, discuss the confidentiality rules during the first meeting and develop the bond during the subsequent meetings
The client may be distrustful towards youth worker especially during the first meeting	Remember during the first meeting about the introduction of a youth worker since only when the employee introduces himself, can one expect the same from his or her client on a reciprocal basis
NEET clients could manifest “resistance” to group work	Try to familiarize and integrate the participants, for example, through integration games based on similarities of the group members (not differences among them), like games: “Similarities”, “What character would I be?”, “Marshmallow Challenge”
People in the NEET category may not want to participate in group activities that may be associated with school education	The most useful tools in further (i.e. after integrating) group work with people in the NEET category are various types of team activities that are not associated with school education, but develop the competences of working in a group and co-operating with others, such as, for example, gamification workshops, creative manual games, or games based on playing social or theatrical roles, such as the “Mini Chamber” game.

In the opinion of the IDI respondents, a key role is played by the person who is a youth worker and the experience of this person in individual and group work with youth and young people.

A young person who is not in education, training, or employment is assessed as a difficult client. They exhibit aversion to institutions and officials, as well as reluctance to work according to a strictly defined schedule or during so-called “office” hours. Reluctance can even take the form of aggression towards the worker who wants to support the NEET person. Such a client also does not recognize standard forms of support, which in Poland generally take place in the following format: training-internship-work, and requires an individual approach on the part of the youth worker and the supporting institution. NEETs, in the opinion of the respondents, may also show reluctance to participate in support programmes based on methods used in formal education, consisting of the acquisition of theoretical or “textbook” knowledge and its subsequent validation.

The specificity of the client also affects problems in recruitment to a given programme, research or initiative. In addition, a lack of knowledge by youth workers of NEET young people may result in difficulties in recruitment of these people by public entities, non-governmental organizations, and commercial companies. Already, after recruiting a young person who is not in education, training or any form of work, in the opinion of the IDI respondents, youth workers should overcome the so-called “resistance” of the young person, lack of motivation and distrust.

Particularly important during the first meeting with the young person is a discussion of confidentiality rules and the introduction of the youth worker. Confidence building should also be developed in subsequent meetings, regardless of the duration of a given programme.

It is also advisable to use a flexible approach to the client and to take into account the needs and possibilities of the NEET person by organizing activities based on the interests of the young people, with realistic goals achievable by the participant.

On the other hand, when it comes to group work with NEETs, the IDI respondents pointed to a lack of motivation or the client’s reluctance to work in a group as problems. When starting group work, the key is to familiarize and integrate the participants, for example through integration games (the so-called ice breakers), like the games “Similarities”, “What character would I be?”, “Marshmallow Challenge”.

The most useful tools in further (i.e. after integrating) group work with people in the NEET category are various types of team activities that are not associated with school education, but develop the competences of working in a group and co-operating with others, such as, for example, gamification workshops, creative manual games, or games based on playing social or theatrical roles, such as the “Mini Chamber” game.

Youth workers are also open to new tools for working with NEET clients, but emphasize the need to test them before introducing them to the programme of activities.

In summarizing the research results, it should be stated that the IDI respondents – youth workers living and working in the Lesser Poland voivodeship with young people, including a NEET client, positively evaluate the work with this category of people, also in a non-formal form, such as through individual or group mentoring. The research also shows one additional important conclusion: because of the diversity of people assigned to the NEET category (including, among others, young unemployed, inactive people, volunteers, people giving up education or work to care for dependents, with health problems or disabilities, people leaving the education system prematurely, ethnic minorities, addicts, people inactive because of their passions, and other people), there is a need to develop new standards of reaching NEETs, recruiting them, and, consequently, changing the rules and mode of work of supporting institutions to more flexible ones and to implement an individual approach to the client, in accordance with their expectations, and not the expectations of a given organization. Finally, it should be noted that opinions on NEET youth work by youth workers are presented, and that the opinions and expectations of young people may differ significantly: therefore it is advisable to confront the information obtained by conducting separate studies with NEET young people who have experience of contact with youth workers.

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5 MENTORING FOR NEETS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PROJECT'S USERS – REFLECTIONS BASED ON RESEARCH IN POLAND

Małgorzata Krywult-Albańska

The article presents a summary of conclusions from focus group interviews (FOCUS – FGI consultations) carried out as part of the project *Mentoring for NEETs. Innovative forms of personal advising supporting educational and employment activation of NEET youth* no. POWR.04.03.00-00-0029/18. The research was conducted among 70 persons working with youth (including NEET youth) to learn their opinions about the solutions adopted in Finland, allowing for possible modifications while implementing them in Poland, so as to adapt them to project users' needs and possibilities. Due to FGI participants' diversity (in terms of their basic socio-economic characteristics such as age, sex, professional background and place of residence, and in terms of the organization they represented and the length of work with the target group) it was possible to obtain a variety of perspectives on the *Mentoring NEETs* project. The article draws on these perspectives to put forward some recommendations.

The *Mentoring NEETs* project was set to be carried out between 1 January 2019 and 31 August 2021². The project's objective over the 32 months was to create, and then to test and modify in a transnational public-private consortium, new tools supporting inclusion and development of social competences useful (among others) on the labour market among Polish NEET youth (young people not in education, employment or training) and the implementation thereof by a minimum of 16 subjects working for NEET youth in Poland.

The target was to produce and implement the following tools and instruments:

- a model of individual and group NEET mentoring, based on solutions adopted in Finland, including materials for mentors (framework scenarios, training materials, etc.);

² *Mentoring for NEETs. Innovative form of personal advising supporting educational and employment activation of NEET youth* no. POWR.04.03.00-00-0029/18. The project was implemented by the company BD Center Ltd. in partnership with the Pedagogical University of Cracow, the Agency of Regional Development Inc. in Rzeszów and Kaakkois-Suomen Ammattikorkeakoulu as part of the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development 2014-2020, Priority Axis IV Social Innovations and Transnational Cooperation, Measure 4.3. Transnational Cooperation, co-financed by the European Union as part of the European Social Fund.

- the first platform in Poland on mentoring NEETs, containing digital products from the project;
- e-learning online NEET mentors courses for users;
- e-learning online courses for NEET mentors;
- tools for examining the effectiveness of NEET mentors among NEET young.

The stage of the project reported herein consisted in organizing consultations with 70 persons working with youth (*project users*), including NEET youth, in various institutions and organizations (both public and private, in non-governmental organizations, support groups etc.), including prospective NEET mentors, who would be able to employ the project's products in their work with young people. Consultations took the form of focus group interviews (FOCUS – FGI) and were held to learn about participants' opinions about the solutions adopted in Finland, allowing for possible modifications while implementing them in Poland, so as to adapt them to users' needs and possibilities.

5.1 The target group for the project's outcomes

The target group for the project's outcomes were people 15–29-years-old, not in employment, education, or training (NEET) for a minimum of four weeks before joining the project (60 persons, including 36 women and 24 men). The model of (individual and group) mentoring NEETs elaborated throughout the project would possibly be used both independently during work with young people belonging to the NEET group or as an instrument supporting programmes for NEET youth educational and/or labour market inclusion, as a means of encouraging participation in the process of educational and/or labour market inclusion. The purpose of the early stage of the process of inclusion was to show that the process would be adapted to their needs and abilities and might present an interesting “adventure”. Mentoring might also be used during the process of educational/labour market inclusion, possibly parallel to other youth programmes, so as to motivate young people to complete these programmes and prevent them from dropping out.

5.2 FGI participants

The participants of focus group interviews (FGI) were 70 people (35 from the podkarpackie and 35 from the małopolskie voivodeship), 18-years-old and older, working with youth, including NEET, in various organizations, including prospective NEET mentors. In each voivodeship six FGIs were carried out with groups of five to six persons in Cracow and Rzeszów in April and May 2019. The purpose was to explore participants' opinions about *Mentoring NEETs* assumptions and the possibility of implementing the project in Poland.

Due to the diversity of FGI participants (in terms of their basic socio-economic characteristics such as age, sex, professional background and place of residence, and in terms of the organization they represented and the length of work with the target group) it was possible to obtain a variety of perspectives on the *Mentoring NEETs* project. Those most often represented were the following groups, each with different experiences and outlooks on young people's problems:

- teachers and employees of educational institutions (including administrative staff);
- employees of (both public and private) employment and training agencies;
- educators (employees of non-governmental organizations and foundations);
- street workers (working with both children and young adults, formally employed by both NGOs and public institutions).

5.3 Perceptions of the project

Consultations (FGIs) revealed that the institutional and social contexts in which the NEET youth functioned were in many respects similar in Poland and in Finland, justifying thereby efforts to implement the *Mentoring NEETs* project in Poland.

The *Mentoring NEETs* project also seemed to be a suitable response to the problems of young people, as diagnosed by participants in the FGI consultations. According to the project's assumptions, mentoring brings about the following effects with respect to NEET youth: being able to talk about oneself more efficiently; augmented self-presentation; improved self-esteem; and improved competences to work with the group and with the mentor. These effects would be desirable considering the main barriers to employment of the NEET youth identified by participants of focus group interviews, including the following:

- lack of motivation to participate in education and employment;
- inability to set oneself goals for the future;
- low self-esteem;
- inability to assess one's strengths and weaknesses;
- sometimes also a discrepancy between expectations concerning prospective jobs (including financial ones) and the opportunities on the labour market.

Most FGI participants expressed their strong approval of the project's assumptions. The following section lists those positive aspects that participants pointed to most often:

- 1) Voluntary participation in mentoring and lack of control of young people; FGI participants pointed to the fact that being under compulsion to take part in something often triggers rejection on the part of young people (the same problem was identified in Finland)

- 2) Lack of formalities; no requirement to get registered; anonymity of mentoring participants
- 3) Using games and digital tools: as they are inherent in young people's lives, using them means being close to their lives
- 4) The role of the NEET mentor: according to FGI participants, young people lack role models – people who would be inspiring for them.

Apart from positive aspects, FGI participants also pointed to some possible problems with implementing the *Mentoring NEETs* project in Poland. These problems include the following:

- 1) Reaching NEET youth: as the FGI participants noted, young people not in employment, education or training live “beyond the system”, outside the reach of most institutions
- 2) Recruiting of NEET mentors: people working with youth are equipped mostly with “soft” qualities which are sometimes difficult to define (such as “charisma”). It is difficult to verify whether a given person has such traits: therefore, some FGI participants expressed their concern that NEET mentors would be difficult to recruit
- 3) Even if NEET mentors could be found, they would face a great challenge fulfilling their role: according to FGI participants, one of the most difficult tasks for them is to build NEET youth's motivation (which is low or non-existent in them) and to inspire them (how to inspire while not imposing anything, and, on the other hand, not discourage them through using examples and experiences too distant from the realities of young people's lives).

5.4 Modifications of the project suggested by FGI participants

According to FGI participants, some aspects of the *Mentoring NEETs* project should be reconsidered, and special emphasis should be put on other aspects. Based on the views expressed by participants during focus group interviews, the following postulates can be put forward:

- 1) There should be no rigid profiles of NEET mentors, with strictly pre-defined characteristics. Such rigid profiles go against the idea of an individualized approach towards young people and the idea of flexibility. In particular, age (according to the project's assumptions 30 and older) and having a personal experience of NEET status in the past should not be preconditions for being a NEET mentor, as they do not automatically entail the ability to start an inspiring relationship (young mentors might be able to do it as well), nor predispose anyone for fulfilling the role.

- The important thing is to match individual mentors with individual young people, according to their particular needs. Mentors, therefore, should differ in terms of age, sex, and personality traits. Although age should be allowed for if it goes along with experience, people younger than 30 should also be considered as prospective mentors
- 2) The main assets of the *Mentoring NEETs* project are flexibility, lack of control, individual approach and equality between mentors and participants. Therefore, similarly to Finland, the project's implementation in Poland should take place beyond formal educational and professional institutions
 - 3) As seen by FGI participants, the aforementioned institutions might, however, serve as venues in which *Mentoring NEETs* might be 'marketed', spreading information about possibilities of getting help in the future, should the need arise (should young people be unemployed and beyond the reach of educational institutions)
 - 4) Both individual mentoring and group mentoring should be promoted. The first, in which one mentor works with one young person, makes the latter feel important, and makes her/him feel worthy of attention. Group mentoring, on the other hand, takes advantage of the effects of group impact.

Considering specific traits of youth belonging to the NEET category, it is important to learn about their background and to learn where they come from, in order to establish a good relationship and work on motivation before they are offered any kind of training or other forms of support. Therefore, the building of self-esteem and making young people aware of their talents and abilities is one of the fundamental goals which NEET mentors should pursue.

5.5 The institutional and social context for the lives of NEET young in Poland and in Finland

The section above provides a summary of opinions on the *Mentoring NEETs* project, as expressed by participants in the focus group interviews. Moreover, further conclusions were reached, based on the methodology of social sciences (participants' opinions are treated as indicators of particular opinions and attitudes) and referring to the social and institutional context in which NEET youth in Poland and in Finland live. The aforementioned context is similar in many respects in both countries. The context consists of discrepancies between the mode of functioning of institutions working towards youth's social inclusion, and the needs and abilities of young people: a tendency to classify and/or to stereotype young people.

- **Discrepancies** between the mode of functioning of institutions working towards youth's social inclusion (designated as a "normative linear model" in Finnish studies), which are focused on fast transition from education to employment, and on the needs and abilities of young people. Such conclusions were reached by Sanna Toiviainen

from the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, based on research carried out among NEET youth: the same conclusions can be drawn from the FGI consultations reported herein. FGI participants representing institutions and companies working towards labour market inclusion of youth seemed determined to reach this goal as fast as possible, immediately upon young people's graduation (a goal which is typical for these kinds of institutions). They stressed the fact that young people are not familiar with available occupations, are indecisive, and unable to set goals for themselves on their own and to choose a professional career. They pointed to the fact that young people often simply follow their peers when choosing a school or a job. They seemed to ignore (or be unaware of) the complex histories of young people, for example, the fact emphasized by educators and employees of non-governmental organizations (whose work with youth is more multi-dimensional) that young people's choices are strongly influenced by their social environment which often determines their (professional) lives. This fact may stem from the very mode of functioning of the institutions themselves, represented by participants, from limited flexibility of the forms and schedules of support which they offer. An example of this lack of flexibility was provided by one FGI participant: young people are offered a reimbursement of the costs of travel to training workshops, even though they are unable to cover the initial cost of the tickets in order to make use of the reimbursement.

- **Tendency to classify:** dividing students into talented and “loafers” (lazy); young people either come from “troublesome environments”, environments which at least partly account for the attitudes typical for this group, or from rich families which provide everything for them with no effort on their part; a dichotomy us-them (with an underlying assumption that “we” used to be in a more difficult position when we were of the same age, while for “them” everything is easier, but they do not feel like doing anything).
- **Stereotyping** of young people. Similarly to the tendency to classify, among the FGI participants this kind of an attitude was expressed mostly by representatives of educational institutions (teachers) and employees of work agencies and similar institutions (organizing training, coaching, etc.)³. When asked about the most salient problems of young people, they frequently mentioned their own problems which they come across in their work: lack of goals and motivation, which prevent teachers and coaches from quickly reaching their objectives of educating and integrating young people into the labour market (the aforementioned “normative linear model”).

To sum up, the similarity of the institutional and social contexts of young people's lives in Poland and in Finland supported the goal of implementing the *Mentoring NEETs* project in Poland.

³ It should be emphasized that focus group interviews are not representative, and therefore these conclusions should not be generalized for all teachers and job counsellors. On the other hand, not all teachers and job counsellors in this study displayed such attitudes.

5.6 Final conclusion

Based on focus group interviews, the following recommendations were put forward: the tools of *Mentoring NEETs* should use the experience and practice of street-working and Programs of Local Activity, both of which provide space in which young people are provided with multiple, comprehensive form of support (similarly to *One Stop Guidance Centers – one place, many possibilities*). These experiences and practices comprise the following:

- 1) Initial encounters with young people should take place “in the field”, in those places where they spend the most time (housing estates, football pitches, squares and other public spaces)
- 2) Contact with young people is not limited to one context (e.g. the educational one, nor one connected with job training). On the contrary, it covers many spheres of life: providing support with peer or family relations, informal psychological counselling, help with decisions concerning education and/or taking up a job and putting these decisions into practice
- 3) The primary goal is to learn about young people’s social background as much as possible in order to become familiar with their social environment. This goal is achieved while going out together to sports events, cultural events, etc. during which a relationship is established
- 4) Providing any kind of ‘practical’ support is preceded by (often long-term) building of trust, by attempts to establish good relationships with young people. Being together during free time and trying to organize this time for young people in a creative manner, so as to make young people aware of their talents and abilities, is the kind of approach that, for the most part, work with young people consists of, e.g. climbing together as a means of discovering one’s predisposition to work at heights.



PART TWO: PRACTICE



6 VIDEO AND ONLINE WORKSHOPS AS TOOLS TO INVOLVE YOUTH

Tiina Ikkonen & Susanna Soisalo

Digital applications and solutions are developing fast. Often young people are the first ones to adopt innovative platforms and new social media channels. The youth work field is trying to keep up with the pace of change, as well as with companies and other service providers who are inducing youth to become their customers. Right now, video is an important channel to produce appealing content to meet the needs of this demanding customer segment. Video can sum up information to just few seconds, which is crucial in attracting young people's attention.

Filming and videos can be used as tools for several needs and functions. They can give opportunities for self-expression and communication. Video can also be informative or work as a tutorial when learning new things. Video is increasingly an essential part of marketing channels' activities. The most important task for a video is to help or entertain the target audience (Sorkio 2019, 53). This sounds very simple, especially when our devices today are making it possible for everyone to be creative. As the use of smart phones has grown, filming and video sharing have become easier than ever. In Finland, video photographing is mainly considered as free activity: filming without permission in public spaces like parks, market squares and shopping malls is allowed. If people are to be filmed or photographed it is still advised to ask for permission. (Lehtinen 2019.)

6.1 Videos have an essential role in storytelling

In youth work, videos are created, for example, to inform and communicate in online platforms. Since young people are hanging out in social media instead of youth clubs, some youth workers have followed them and started vlogging in YouTube. Another lighter way to do youth work online is to create stories or live shows in Instagram and TikTok. They can be many-sided: from informative videos to online playing or other group activities. All this requires understanding and learning the channels and their possibilities. It also takes courage to perform in videos and put yourself out there in different social media challenges, like dancing. Most of us are using these platforms in our private lives, but it is a different story when one takes care of social media among core activities and responsibilities. Being

active and interactive in social media takes time and resources. Creating content, doing marketing activities and interacting with followers is a full-time job, if you really want to make an impact. Hiring youth as social media experts in youth services could be an important thought: it would enable peer to peer work and content could be more appealing to most eligible target groups. Another way to communicate with youth in social media is to cooperate with known vloggers, and to try and see how influencer marketing could reach out to youngsters.

6.2 Video applications in the Mentoring NEETs project

The *Mentoring NEETs* project has used videos in several contexts, and in different ways and formats depending on the target group. When using videos, it is important to define the audience and create one video with one message just for them (Sorkio 2019, 97). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the project was transformed by using a remote work basis, which made video conferences, webinars and online workshops familiar with the project team and stakeholders. Videos have also been used for mentor and project personnel presentations. With an animation (Picture 1), it has been possible to open up the mentoring process for youth, as well as what it could be used for and how to apply the process. Instagram Stories have provided a way of generating marketing actions.

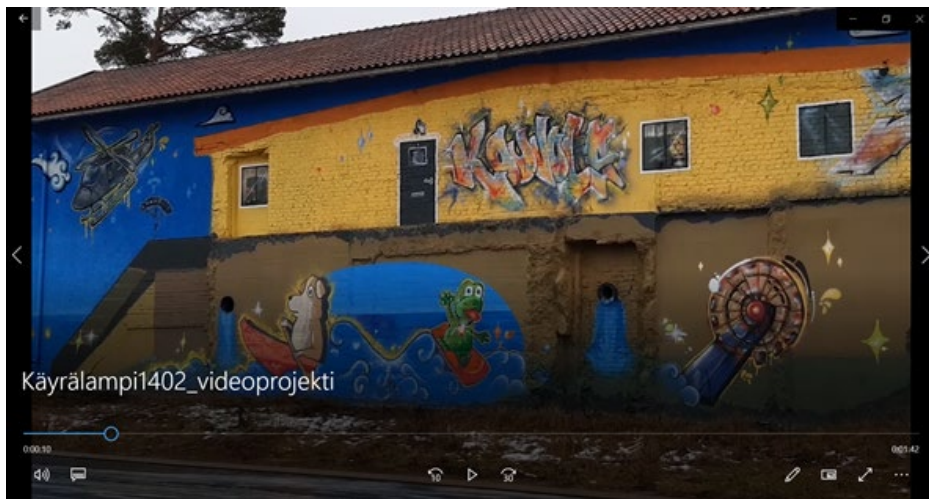


Picture 1. Animation was one way to inform about mentoring through storytelling. Screenshot from the Mentoring NEETs animation, made by Jani Lehtinen.

One example of piloting online group mentoring with video content was *Kaupunkilyhäiri*, a City Short Film workshop. City Short Film (CSF) is inspired by city symphonies, a movie genre from the 1920s. The inspiration for this came from a workshop, where young people gave ideas for group mentoring. CSF invites young people to script write, film and edit a short film from their hometown. The participants get the chance to point out important places and activities and raise their own voice, either in a critical or artistic tone. The idea is to learn by doing with the support of the group and professional mentors from movie and media industries. The project can teach new skills in film-making, give ideas for hobbies or future careers, develop creative and critical thinking, and give an experience of belonging and finding a role as an active citizen. City Short Film can also teach technology skills, which are needed in future work and job seeking. No assumptions should be made, however, that all young people are “digital natives”, automatically knowing how to master these skills. Some of the young are against technology, and some are unable to use technology outside social networks. (Alastalo et al. 2019, 38; 43.)

CSF should be considered as less than a technology course, and more as an art project, which was worth testing because of the known benefits and several positive impacts art and art activities can have. Art can increase social participation and inclusion, decrease exclusion and alleviate loneliness. Especially for young people, participation in communal art activities can help to decrease social isolation, support the ability to build positive social relationships and encourage participation in communal and civil operations. (Laitinen 2017.)

At first, City Short Film was tested in a very light touch way in a group of different aged people. When listing possible places to film, nature arose as a common theme for all the participants. The group decided to visit a nearby lake where everyone could film the surroundings and landscape freely. One short film was then created by combining everyone’s video clips (Picture 2). This test helped to create a five-session pilot project, which was transformed into an online workshop because of the pandemic situation in spring 2020. Google applications, like Classroom, Meet and Jamboard were used as tools and platforms for online workshops. They were chosen because they are familiar, easy to use and free. The applications are connected, which makes communicating, working and material sharing and saving effortless.



Picture 2. Screenshot from the test video filmed in Käyrälampi, Kouvola.

Five sessions were themed to follow the film-making process:

- 1) Orienteering to project and ideation
- 2) Scriptwriting and location planning
- 3) Video photographing
- 4) Editing
- 5) Premiere.

Each session was planned to take 2 to 3 hours of group working online. The sessions were facilitated by two staff members and supported by two professional mentors. Two participants enrolled in the online workshop. Unfortunately both participants left the project after two sessions and no feedback was received from them. Mentors and facilitators then evaluated the project for future implementations. There have also been several discussions with youth work professionals to develop City Short Film further. One development idea was to create a tutorial video of the film-making process with the phases listed above. Project trainee Susanna answered the need and created step-by-step video instructions (Picture 3). This would take the project closer to independent online courses and further away from the idea of group and professional mentoring, even though mentors could provide tips for filming through video clips. Anyway, in order to create an appealing and functioning service, the objective and next step would be to involve youth in the development process, but there is a challenge in communicating and marketing the idea and inviting the target group to join in voluntarily.



Picture 3. Screenshot from tutorial video made by Susanna Soisalo.

6.3 Future steps in online workshops

There are obstacles to tackle when creating an online workshop or a live activity with technological devices. First, basic technology should work; participants can easily give up if connections are breaking up. Attendees can also decide not to join if the user interface of a platform is difficult to use. If devices and software are not familiar, people can find it hard and even scary and this can drive them away with a fear of failure. Challenges can arise from personal devices' age, updates and memory capacities, which can also negatively affect wanted functions. Injuries and chronic diseases also affect how participants can make the most out of smart devices and applications. Finding information presented online can be challenging for a person with difficulties in seeing. When striving for accessible services it is necessary to take care, for example, about colour contrasts and caption scaling. (Karvonen & Makkonen 2016.)

One key element on the challenge list is lack of interaction online or its difference compared to live meetings. New digital learning environments can raise the threshold to participate. When Covid-19 closed schools, Finnish youth found remote school hard and difficult. Many students became exhausted and stressed studying online. However, remote school also had positive impacts, for example, on people who live far from their schools or who have difficulties with social skills. To tackle at least some of these challenges, it would be worth investing in user-centric processes. Instead of guessing which platform or programme could work, a little research might help: testing and observing, collecting feedback and asking customers about their experiences and way of using digital solutions could help in developing easy to use and interactive services online.

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7 HOW MIGHT WE? CO-CREATING A SERVICE THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF NEET YOUNG, YOUTH WORK PROFESSIONALS AND VOLUNTARY MENTORS

Tiina Ikkonen

The starting point in the *Mentoring NEETs* project was to develop a voluntary based, low threshold mentoring model for youth services in the Kymenlaakso region. The public sector needs user-centric and new pre-emptive services and activities that can solve customers' problems more efficiently than current practices (Mänttari 2014, 109). The question is how might we create a service that acknowledges the needs of the target group and can integrate into the service network at municipality or community sector level? With the help of service design, the *Mentoring NEETs* project has sought to elaborate a mentoring service for NEET young in co-operation with youth, mentors, non-profit organizations and youth services. Service design tools and design thinking have been applied into the project team's internal processes. This article opens up the development process from a designer's perspective.

7.1 Service design involves users with development

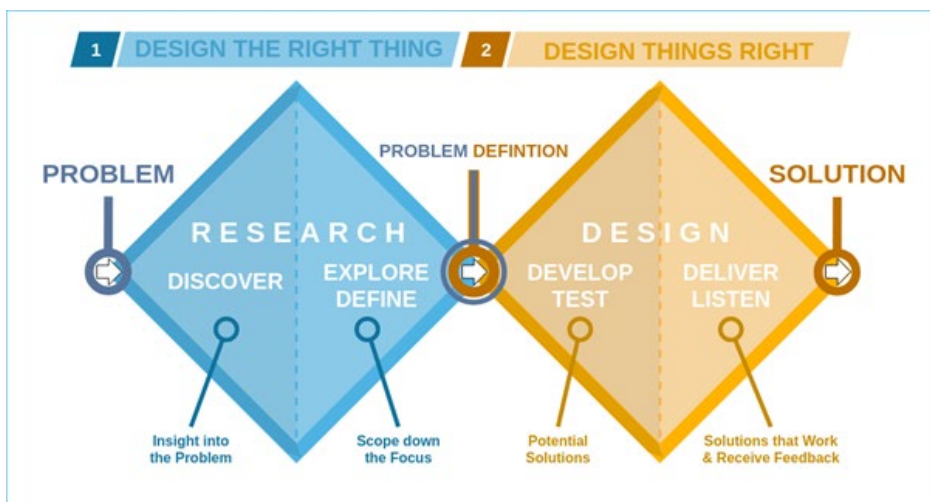
Service design means the ideating and planning of a physical or immaterial product or service together with users. The developed service should meet the needs of the end-user, but also answer to service providers' commercial or other objectives. (Gävert 2018, 53.) The aim of the user-centric design process is also to evolve functional and usable services (Miettinen 2016, 38). Service design achieves a positive user experience at each point where customer and service provider meet and interact (Klaar 2014, 15).

In order to create incomparable customer experiences and useful and functional services, it is essential to invite different stakeholders into the design process. Co-creation can be carried through the whole service design process, applying different methods in different phases (Miettinen 2016, 34). There are several ways to involve stakeholders. They can be seen as members in the design team or as participants who will share their opinions and

thoughts through interviews, observations, self-documentation or in co-creation workshops. The most important part is to get to know your customer, empathize and step into their shoes. This means gaining user insight, which is the starting point for the service design process. (Miettinen 2016, 31.)

Empathy can also rise in co-creation sessions, where thoughts and perspectives from different participants collide. Co-creation sessions and workshops are good for ideating and prototype testing. These facilitated sessions use dialogue, playful tasks and artefacts to reveal the latent knowledge which might not be revealed by interviews or questionnaires. Different research methods are needed in order to receive user understanding. (Sanders & Stappers 2012, 66–67.) Among these aims, co-creation can have other objectives, like improving co-operation in group work, finding a common language between participants, improving creative thinking and user-centric attitudes and creating new networks (Miettinen 2016, 81).

It is common in the service design process to combine both quantitative and qualitative methods (Tuulaniemi 2011, 144) and to use several tools and mixed methods to gain user insight, produce ideas and prototypes and present solutions. Iteration and continuous planning are also typical in the process. Iteration with several design rounds in ideation, testing and evaluation give information in order to develop services further (Miettinen 2016, 23). The alternation of abundant ideation (divergence) and framing the ideas (convergence) (Tuulaniemi 2011, 113), is part of the iteration process and can be seen in *Double Diamond* (Picture 1), which is a typical process model in the design field.



Picture 1: Double Diamond model. Visualization licensed under Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication. (Digi-ark, 2020.)

Double Diamond was developed by The Design Council. The model is divided into four parts:

- 1) Discover
- 2) Define
- 3) Develop
- 4) Deliver.

In the first part, information and user insight are gathered to discover user needs and develop ideas. Discoveries are then defined into more specific briefs and possibilities. The aim is to find the key problem or challenge to solve. The development part opens the second diamond and several solutions to the design challenge are then created, prototyped, tested and iterated. Finally, the created service will be launched and taken into practice. After this, the service still needs evaluation and continuous development to see if it has reached the target group and its needs. (Design methods for developing services, 6–7.) Later on this model has been developed further as design challenges have become more complex. Design is not a linear process, but an iterative one, which includes various working methods and could even be started from testing or prototyping (Hambeukers 2019.) Testing is fundamental in the design process: it does not help just to refine solutions but also to better understand the people who are in the centre of your service (Doorley et al. 2018, 22).

7.2 Design implementations in the project

Service design draws from industrial design methods and principles. Industrial design has always been user-oriented, but now the designer's role is to be a collaborator and interpreter between different groups, rather than being just a form giver to a functional product. People are in the centre and active participants in the process and things happen more and more in networks. This means the service designer should have good social and communication skills and proficiency in research, facilitation, demonstration and leadership. (Miettinen 2014, 11.) Obviously, this makes service design teamwork. Different skills and knowledge are needed when developing solutions to complex problems in large networks in various contexts and fields. Creative ideas emerge in multidisciplinary work, where different expertise and fields meet. Where the designer has know-how in design *methods*, anyone or any organization can use design *thinking*. It means the ability to work in a creative and proactive way in problem solving and state of change situations. Design thinking is solution-oriented and involves activity, which uses multidisciplinary knowledge and creative, visual, operational and concretizing methods. (Miettinen 2014, 11.)

The design thinking approach is useful in the project world, where situations can change rapidly, risks realize and projects will not proceed as planned. In addition, the *Mentoring NEETs* project adapted to changes when it could not utilize the original plans of how to co-create service with youth. Since youth were not directing to mentoring pilots as expected, nor attending development groups, it became challenging to collect qualitative user understanding locally from this customer group. Originally, the idea was for the young people to participate in service development through interviews and co-creating sessions together with professionals and mentors. As already mentioned, the starting point for the service process is to know your customers. Interviews were supposed to give an overall knowledge of youngsters' everyday life and situations where a mentoring service might be needed. Only a few people took part in the interviews. This is why the service design approach was later focused on youth work professionals, mentors and project teams' inner activities.

For example, co-creation sessions were arranged for youth work professionals to ideate youth-appealing solutions to test mentoring in different organizations and in different forms. In addition, the Delphi questionnaire was used to collect opinions and future visions of mentoring as a service in the Kymenlaakso region. The results from Delphi were analysed to create descriptions of how the mentoring service could work from the perspectives of the young people, mentors and professionals. These product descriptions and visualizations then worked as prototypes to communicate what the service could actually be like.

In addition, in the beginning of the project, potential mentors and professionals were interviewed to develop orientation material for future mentors. This material package was tested in several mentor info events live and online. Events worked as group discussions and a forum for asking, ideating and exchanging experiences and knowledge. The project website and other marketing materials were continuously developed throughout the project according to feedback received from different stakeholder groups. What about the answer to the question: How might we co-create a service that meets the needs of different stakeholders? Finally, several tests, conversations, prototypes and mentoring pilots took place on what could take development forward and to point out what there was still to be solved. When embracing design thinking attitudes, there are no wrong answers nor failed attempts. All the received information takes the process forward and guides where to go next.

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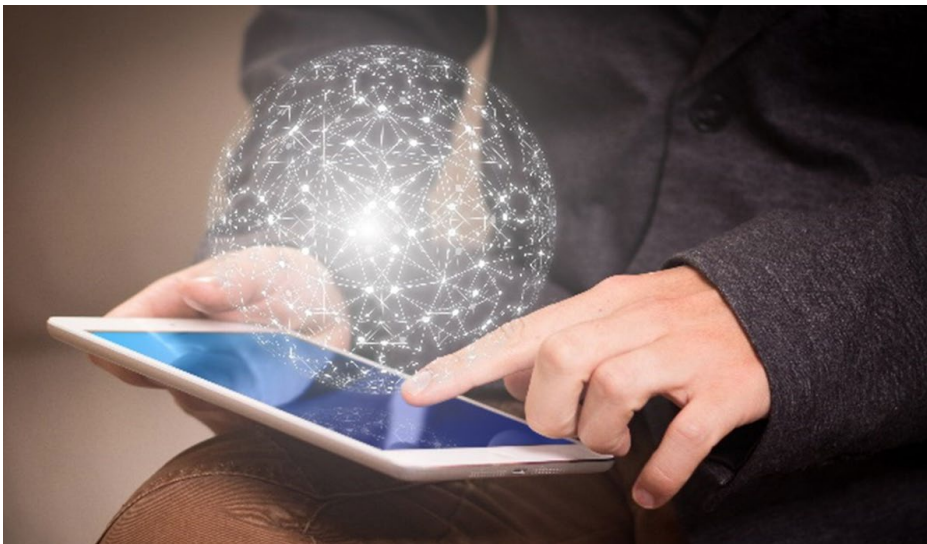
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8 DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

Jani Lehtinen



Picture 1. Digital accessibility (Pixabay)

When we talk about accessibility, the Finnish language has two words⁴, which have something of the same meaning, but which are used in different operating environments.

Accessibility is either talked about in the physical environment or in the digital environment. Physical accessibility is talked about when the physical environment or state is handy, safe and active for all the users. In a physical accessibility area, attention has been paid to prams or, for example, to wheelchairs for moving persons. In turn, digital accessibility refers to the digital network world. The digital accessibility means that the digital contents of the web pages and mobile applications (Picture 1) are easily understood by everybody. Many services nowadays are in the network and they are used digitally. The contents of these services should fulfil conditions of accessibility. Accessibility belongs to all of us. (Yleistä saavutettavuudesta s.a.)

⁴ esteettömyys ja saavutettavuus

In this first section of this article the differences between physical accessibility and digital accessibility were described. In the following sections, only digital accessibility is described.

8.1 Accessibility in the digital environment

Attention must be paid to accessibility when designing network services. In the contents, attention must be paid to difficult terms and to sentence structures. The technique must be easy to use. Differences between people and their different needs must be taken into consideration (Picture 2).

The special needs of users of digital services may be, for example:

- sight injury;
- hearing defect;
- development injuries;
- learning difficulties;
- mental problems;
- weak knowledge of the Finnish language.



Picture 2. The users of digital services have special needs (Pixabay)

In addition, temporary environmental factors may make operating in the digital environment more difficult. Some such situations are loud environments or very bright sunshine (Saavutettavuuskoulutus 2021).

The network services to be planned help to increase the disabled persons' independence and their part in the society. In the planning of network services attention must be paid to the following sectors:

- the network service must be carried out technically right and faultlessly. The service must be able to be used on different devices and should contain assistive functions, such as voice control;
- the network service should be handy and easily perceived. Navigation should be fluent and the contents easily found;
- the contents of the network service should be clear and intelligible. The text should be readable and the language intelligible (see Picture 3).

(Digipalvelulain vaatimukset s.a.)

EASE OF USE



Picture 3. Sectors of accessibility in network services (Pixabay, modified by Jani Lehtinen)

Using the digital service design, services can be designed to pay attention to accessibility. Service design is always user-oriented and in it an attempt is made to understand the user and the user's needs. So, services must always be shaped considering the user's needs and limitations so that accessibility can be achieved.

8.2 Digital service law

The digital service law (306/2019), came into force in Finland on 1 April 2019. The accessibility directive drawn up by the EU was executed with the help of the law. The purpose of the law is to promote the availability, quality and information security of digital services and the accessibility of the contents so that everybody finds it possible to use digital services equally. There is the general agreement of the UN on disabled persons' rights in the background of the accessibility directive (Laki digitaalisten palvelujen tarjoamisesta 306/2019).

According to the digital service law (306/2019), the digital service has to meet three demands:

- 1) *The service and its contents have to meet the accessibility demands.*
- 2) *The accessibility of the service and its contents have to be estimated and the state of accessibility and its possible weaknesses have to be presented in an accessibility specification.*
- 3) *The service has to contain an electric feedback channel for the users to feedback on failures of accessibility. The feedback has to be answered in 14 days.*

(Digipalvelulain vaatimukset s.a.)

8.3 Accessibility in videos

By using the videos and pictures in the contents, accessibility improves. In particular, the videos are a good method to get digital contents to be more easily understood. For example, people who suffer learning or reading difficulties often benefit from videos (Videoiden ja äänilähetysten saavutettavuus s.a.). Videos also need to be subtitled (Picture 4) and interpreted to make the content accessible enough.



Picture 4. Subtitled video improves accessibility (Mentoring NEETs project)

Subtitles are useful, for example, when watching video in a noisy environment or when the viewer is in a quiet place where no sound is allowed. Subtitles also help in language learning. Subtitling is especially important for the hearing impaired and hard of hearing. This touches many persons because, for example, from a population of 5.5 million Finns, as much as 750 000 persons have some degree of hearing loss. In turn description interpretation helps visually disabled and weak-eyed persons (Videoiden ja äänilähetysten saavutettavuus s.a.).

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9 COOPERATING LOCALLY TO PROMOTE THE MENTORING PROJECT

Ilari Salomaa & Sangara Novak

The *Mentoring NEETs* project is part of a local multi-professional network in the Kymenlaakso region of Finland. The network includes different organizations and instances influencing and operating in the field of youth work. This article showcases these operators and their activities in the Kouvola area, and how they link with the mentoring project. In addition, we consider thoughts on youth work in Kouvola from the volunteer's point of view, which is valuable when developing the mentoring model.

9.1 Multi-professional networks benefit youth

Results have shown that successful multi-professional co-operation strengthens fulfilling clients' needs, produces benefits to the co-operational operator and helps to implement organizations' objectives in the field of social services and healthcare (Helin 2016, 3).

Our project co-operates with various instances and different experts at the local level and also internationally. In this article it is the local operators that are in focus, but we also have project companions from Bulgaria and Poland. Nationally, our project covers the Kymenlaakso region, South-Eastern Finland. Co-operation with local companions is essential to us: developing and implementing the mentoring system would be impossible without the help of youth work organisations.

In the Kouvola area, we have built a network with various, multi-professional operators such as the City of Kouvola Youth Centre and outreach youth work, such as the multicultural centre, Saaga; the cultural workshop, Kulta (KaksPy); the NGO, Kulmakivi; the vocational school, KSAO; and also our organization, the South-Eastern University of Applied Sciences (XAMK).

9.2 Different paths, same goals

All the organizations mentioned do social work among young people, but from different perspectives. Let us look at various organizations' fields of expertise. In the main, the nationwide youth service system operates different branches, such as youth centres, youth

houses and outreach youth work, as well as many other local projects providing different activities to youngsters. In the Kouvola area, we have cooperated with youth services and outreach youth work. In addition, the co-writer of this article has been working in the youth centre Anjala (Kymenlaakso region), which provides different activities, such as camp schools for young people.

Youth centres provide support and guidance to youths aged between 13–29 years. The City of Kouvola has 10 youth houses overall. They are safe places for youngsters to spend their free time, meet their friends, play games, and of course, get guidance and help for managing their everyday lives and taking part in organized activities. In the centre of Kouvola city is the headquarters of the Kouvola youth work ecosystem. It contains a youth house, some dedicated space for one-on-one meetings and counselling and offices for special and outreach youth workers.

In our project, we have been part of various events organized at Kouvola's youth centre, for example, social gatherings for young adults. The aim has been to reach young people who are interested in participating in the mentoring process. At those gatherings we have had inclusive and creative activities, for example, the *headline of your life* workshop (Picture 1). Youngsters were asked to write their own future-self headline in form of a newspaper front page. The thought behind this casual and entertaining activity was to challenge youngsters to think about their dreams and possibilities about their own future selves, empowering and encouraging them to reach their potential.



Picture 1. Picture from headline workshop held at youth house (photo Ilari Salomaa)

The multicultural centre, Saaga, is an international meeting place for all people in the Kouvola region, not only immigrants. Operating from the heart of Kouvola city, Saaga advocates for immigrants and immigrant communities, overseeing their social benefits and rights. Saaga's purpose of activity is to support immigrants' integration into Finnish society. Saaga is politically and religiously independent, open and equal for everyone. We have had weekly mentoring receptions, as well as onetime-type events at Saaga (Picture 2). As per our mentor, weekly meetings have been fruitful and eye-opening as discussions about religion, cultural differences, warzone experiences, racism experienced here in Finland and so on have occurred. Weekly attendance has been a significant factor about building trust between immigrants and our mentor.



Picture 2. Multicultural centre Saaga's stand outside Saaga's office (photo Ilari Salomaa)

The cultural workshop, Kulta, (Picture 3) is run by a local mental health awareness association called the South-Eastern Finland Social-Psychiatric Association (Kakspä R.A.) and offers daily activities for young people. Mentoring projects have had monthly mentor meetings at Kulta's headquarters, similarly to Saaga's mentoring reception. We hear more about cultural workshop Kulta, the City of Kouvola's youth house and youth centre Anjala in Sangara Novak's volunteer work story.



Picture 3. Cultural workshop Kulta’s weekly activities flyer (photo Ilari Salomaa)

The NGO Kulmakivi offers supported work trial periods to young adults in their own cafeteria and different kinds of activities to young people, for example, empowering art workshops. They also have hangaround evenings weekly for youngsters aged 16–29. At Café Kulmakivi, they have billiard tables, music instruments to play, board games and other recreational possibilities. Café Kulmakivi is located on the busiest street of the city so youngsters find their way there easily and it is quite popular among young people. When the Covid-19 situation is easier, we have planned to have art-based mentoring workshops in Kulmakivi.

9.3 International view on youth work in Kouvola by Sangara Novak

The story of Sangra Novak is also a description of the effect of the Covid-19 situation on youth work. The Mentoring NEETs project has faced similar obstacles. Planned face-to-face activities had to change to online activities.

I came to Kouvola as a European Solidarity Corps volunteer at the end of last summer. The coordinator of the project is the Youth Services of Kouvola, who host three volunteers

every year, each working in a different facility connected to youth work, helping with event organizing, visiting schools and promoting international experiences. I have mainly been working in the youth centre Anjala and the cultural centre Kulta.

The youth centre Anjala's main activity is camp schools. They also organize activities for local youngsters, like nature schooldays, teambuilding activities for local sports teams and at the end of the school year a summer camp week for local children. Every year Anjala organizes two nature school days for the 4th grades. This year one of them happened at the local school and the other in the grounds of youth centre Anjala. We asked the groups if they knew Anjala and each time there was at least one child who had visited Anjala's summer camp before. These are supported by the government, so all the children who want can join. Another way in which the youth centre try to support the young people in Kouvola is to sponsor them. Every year they pick a local sports team and organize some teambuilding activities for them.

They are also very active in international youth work. The instructors participate in international exchanges for youth workers, work together with others in strategical partnerships and prepare international youth exchanges with local youth groups. During the time I was there, we worked on a Finland – Italy exchange. The idea for the exchange came from a group of youngsters from the local riding club. They asked Anjala to support them with the project application and realization.

Kulttuuripaja Kulta is a place for young adults between 18–35 years working on the principles of peer support, active participation and guidance. Their activities are incubated and guided by the young adults visiting, who are trained to become peer supporters. That make their schedule full of different activities, from sports to craft and discussions to themed days and holiday celebrations like Halloween. Even after the corona situation became worse and they were forced to move their activities to different online platforms, they managed to keep the majority of them active and keep their outside activities, which provided at least some personal exchanges.

One thing I like about the youth work here is that youth workers work half their working time in youth houses and half of their time in schools as youth counsellors in school and help with inclusion, growing community, organizing small group activities, events, informing about different topics like sex education and substance abuse, preventing bullying and improving overall school satisfaction. That makes it easier to create a connection to the youngsters and makes the youth houses more visible. The downside is that the youth houses are open only two to three days a week.

In the centre of Kouvola city is the main youth work building. It contains a youth house, some dedicated space for one-on-one meetings and counselling and offices for the special and outreach youth workers, who regularly organize special events and theme weeks.

The youth house is open for youngsters up to the age of 29. Because this is a quite a big age gap, they started to have some days dedicated for the youngest, and some for young adults over 18. Sadly, due to the current situation I was not able to experience almost all the events and theme weeks as the events they usually organized and most of the theme weeks were either cancelled or reduced to happening mostly on social media, which presents a big challenge for youth workers when co-operating with different actors in this field.

In my opinion the corona situation mostly affected the youth houses in Kouvola. Most of their activities are for the moment limited to Discord and different social media channels, which makes it difficult to connect and work with other local actors in the field of youth work. In the beginning of my year here when most of the facilities were still working normally, I met some cultural workshop visitors in Nuorten Talo and played floor ball with Kulttuuripaja's sport group in one of the youth houses, but I know those are currently closed.

The youth centre Anjala also needs to make some adjustments because of the Corona situation. At the moment, it looks as if the camp season will be much smaller, because schools will not be allowed to leave their regions. To give at least the local school children some normality, workers are trying to adopt their programmes and reach out to schools.

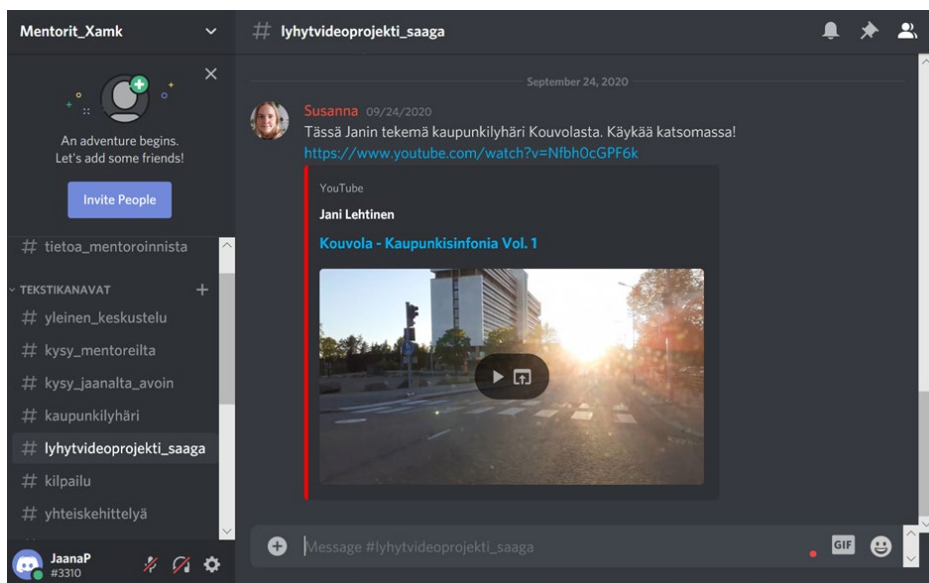
Nevertheless, the youth sector in Kouvola is still active, and tries to adapt to the new situation and find new ways in youth work. From the Mentoring NEETs project point of view, co-operation with the network of youth work delivered by different organizations has functioned even despite the Covid-19 situation.

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10 EXPERIENCES OF MENTORING YOUNG PEOPLE

Susanna Soisalo



Picture 1. Screenshot from Mentoring NEETs – Discord channel (Susanna Soisalo)

My name is Susanna, a 22-year old student of community pedagogy. I did my last training in the *Mentoring NEETs* project during 2020. My duties included the maintenance of the Discord channel and communication with youth in Discord. In autumn 2020, it was suggested that I could act as a mentor for a young person who had contacted our project.

Mentoring took place in Discord. This was especially useful because I, and the mentored person, did not live in the same area. It was natural for both of us to use digital tools, in this case Discord, as a means of communication. Discord was well known to both of us beforehand. For myself it was beneficial because I rarely use Discord in my private life, so my user account was created for work purposes only.

It was agreed in the beginning that we chat twice per week for a couple of hours. Having said that, communication is slow in a chat, so we discussed more than that if necessary. Sometimes we chatted late in the evening, even if I aimed to answer messages in the morn-

ing. I encouraged the mentored youngster to contact me if there was something on their mind. They did after the early stages.

In the beginning, communication was quite formal but the mentored person told me about their life nevertheless. In our first chat, we relied on the discussion between the project worker and the mentored person. Because of that, I knew the person's age, gender and general life situation. It helped us both to outline the mentoring process. It took a few times chatting to get to know each other so that the goals for mentoring could be determined.

Our first hurdle for mentoring was that the mentored person was unsure what they wanted to do in the future. Nevertheless, the motivation to change the situation was there. At this stage, I offered knowledge about different services and educational opportunities. The first concrete goal was to find some sort of hobby or interest that would activate and elevate the everyday life and mood of the mentored youngster. To find out a suitable interest, I used an internet questionnaire. We did find interesting options for hobbies but they ended up at the planning stage.

The whole direction of mentoring changed when the mentored person decided to apply to school. The young person in question needed a lot of encouragement when they pondered over educational choices. After comparing different schools and options, the mentored person applied to and was admitted to school. After this mentoring centred around concrete arrangements. Means of public transport and student allowances were amongst the things we discussed.

The most challenging dimension of mentoring was to use the right wording despite the fact that chatting on the internet is an everyday activity for me. I had to explain some of my expressions when I was not accurate enough. Because we were using a digital platform, humour was also a risky choice when I could not see the other person's reaction. All in all, communication was quite relaxed.

The mentoring process was a pleasant experience for me as a mentor. For my professional development, it was useful to gain experience of individual guidance, which is otherwise limited in studies. It felt good to be useful and to be able to help somebody. I will gladly be a mentor again.

11 NEETSLAB – PROJECT RESUMÉ

Valeria Nikolova

The NEETsLAB project – *Mentoring through Innovation – Mission Possible* – is implemented in Bulgaria and funded by the Transnational Partnerships procedure, the Operational Programme *Human Resources Development 2014–2020*. The project is transnational with the beneficiary being the NGO, Peonies, in Bulgaria, and the partner being the South-Eastern University of Applied Sciences, XAMK, Finland.

The concept of creating the project arises from the need to introduce innovative tools for working with inactive young people. This community is characterized by lack of qualifications and motivation, low educational status and lack of job search skills, which leads to social isolation. Identifying and working with inactive young people with traditional well known and well-used methods is extremely difficult, and therefore this project contributes to the creation of existing non-standard and innovative methods for working with them.

The project *NEETsLAB – Mentoring through Innovation – Mission Possible* is a set of innovations aimed at mentoring inactive young people aged 14–29 from the NEETs group. These are people who do not study or work. The young people who participated in the project are from the Ruse region – Ruse, the Sredna Kula neighbourhood and the village of Brestovitsa.

The innovation *Matti-men's journeys to work* was created in Finland by the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences XAMK, and was successfully implemented for the first time in Bulgaria by the association Peonies by testing on 12 inactive young people. It consists of three panels, each with 30 workshops.

Panel 1: *Paths in our lives* contributes to young people reaching the path for their lives, with the support of their mentors.

Panel 2: *Learning through play* is practically oriented. It uses the “gamification” method – learning through play, applied in a non-traditional way, where young people play computer games of an educational nature. Thus, they form norms of behaviour for good and bad, acquire skills for using modern technologies for personal and professional development and discover the working model for them to maintain personal motivation.

Panel 3: *Evaluation, inspiration and dissemination* is a concluding panel. In it, the participants create new contacts, introducing themselves to employers who visit on site to be part of the real business environment. Mentoring, in turn, also helps participants return to the labour market or education.

The transnational co-operation on the project also led to the creation of a new “model for the transfer of intelligence between generations”. This is actually the second innovation called *Inno_mentor*, which is a set of three tools tested and applied to 21 inactive young people from Bulgaria:

Tool 1: *Individual digital mentoring* – is an online mentoring of inactive young people, provided through the platforms Facebook and Discord with the participation of young people and mentors. Here young people can communicate with their mentors remotely, both in groups and individually. The purpose of the tool is to create a comfortable online space for activating and motivating young people. The tool also contributes to the development of individual mentoring from a distance by using the modern knowledge of the digitalized youth society, namely, social networks. It has become a successful means of communication between mentors and young people.

Tool 2: *Interest groups* is implemented through:

- photography group – which aims to engage young people in photography and turn the hobby into a profession. Thanks to the tool, young people gained a new knowledge of photography;
- culinary group – where young people learn new knowledge and gain practice in the field of cooking. Through cooking, the participants developed their hidden potential and passion for gastronomy, creating truly delicious culinary masterpieces;
- art activities group – young people learned new knowledge in *découpage*, working with paper and origami. The acquired skills are the basis and opportunity to start your own small business in the field of social entrepreneurship.

Tool 3: Club houses. The third tool in this project is the so-called *club houses*. The club house is a place where young people with disabilities gather, gain professional qualifications and work skills and are provided with the necessary support for the realization of the labour market. A demonstration on the implemented project of a club house was held with five young people with disabilities, visiting the RALIZ-BALIZ centre, according to an innovatively developed programme.

We are proud that under the project *NEETsLAB – Mentoring through Innovation – Mission Possible* we can report a number of results. The project helped to:

- arrange the work of three people from the target group;
- return four young people to education;
- activate the job search of 12 young people;
- enable the registration in the Labor Office Directorate of a young person;
- generate interest and inclusion in evening education for two young people;
- involve in the project the publication of an e-book on mentoring through innovations authored by XAMK, Finland;
- create a guide for future users to implement the innovation *Matti-men's journeys to work*;
- create the innovation *Inno_mentor*;
- promote the results achieved by the project through its presentation at international forums in Poland and Finland;
- establish contacts with institutions working on the problems of NEETs such as the Employment Agency through the Regional Employment Service Directorate – Ruse and the Labor Office Directorate – Ruse, the Social Assistance Agency through the Social Assistance Directorate – Ruse, the RALIZ-BALIZ Day Care Centre, the non-governmental sector, centres for personal and professional development, a centre for family-type accommodation for children and youth with disabilities – St. Mina, a centre for work with street children at the Bulgarian Red Cross and others.

The project is proof that in order to obtain a successful end product, it is necessary to create strong co-operation between the beneficiary, the partner, target groups and institutions – efforts that are worthwhile in order to turn the impossible into a mission possible.

12 RESULTS FROM INNOVATION 1 MATTI – MEN’S JOURNEYS TO WORK

Snezhina Churova & Valeria Nikolova

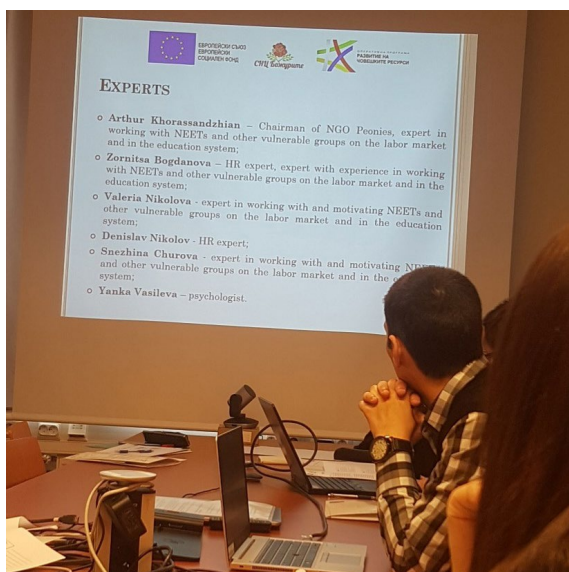
The innovation *Matti-men’s journeys to work* was created in Finland by the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, successfully implemented for the first time in Bulgaria by the association Peonies by testing on 12 inactive young people through a project *NEETsLAB – Mentoring through Innovations – Mission Possible*, funded by the operational programme *Human Development Resources* from 2014–2020. It consists of three panels, each with 30 workshops.

Panel 1: *Paths in our lives*

Panel 2: *Learning through play*

Panel 3: *Evaluation, inspiration and dissemination*

The innovation was tested on 12 young people from the NEET group from Bulgaria, separated into two groups: six young people from Sredna Kula, Ruse, and six young people from Brestovitsa, Borovo. The youth and professionals were informed about the team group of the project (Picture 1.)



Picture 1. Presentation of the project (Photo: work group)

12.1 Achievements of the group from the Sredna Kula district, Ruse

Group dynamics

The work in this group followed the stages of the functioning of each group: formation, struggle, standardization and execution (according to Bruce Tuckman). The first meetings registered mistrust between the team members and contradictory attitudes towards the process, but also feelings of pride in the participants that they were chosen for the team.

The methods and content that the mentors used “melted the ice” among the young people and created a sense of empathy for the goals and tasks, as well as between the members. In the second stage of work with the group, differences appeared, although timidly, and there were clashes of different perceptions, opinions and understandings of the participants both in the process of work and on the topics discussed. “Groups” were registered in the group, and the looming conflicts were skilfully used by the mentors for the purposes of the process: to stimulate self-knowledge and to develop skills for self-defence, but also skills for good functioning in a team and group. Results in this direction began to be reported in the next stage of group work, called “rationing”. The participants accepted the norms of work and their roles and responsibilities (with a few exceptions).

The atmosphere became more friendly, and the young people more empathetic and supportive. This was the stage in which individual work with the mentors started, initially conducted after the group sessions, and later according to agreed individual plans (live meetings, telephone and online calls, chats in Messenger, etc.). The parallel implementation of group and individual work contributed to the development of processes such as trust, acceptance, empathy and tolerance, as well as self-observation and self-analysis, self-knowledge, motivation and responsibility: goals to which the whole process was directed.

Individual achievements

At the end of the joint work on this project, there were definite signs of personal growth in young people. At the beginning of the process, the girls showed higher activity than the boys, who were more reserved and closed. In the end, each of them not only took an active part in the joint process, but had a clear position in their personal intentions and daily life. Half of them made a firm decision and took real action to complete their education: one of the young people is convinced that it is good to continue their education at a higher level, and all of them are already looking for a legal job with a clearly defined contractual relationship (two of them are already having job interviews).

The initially observed verbal aggressive tension in the group, provoked by the impulsiveness of some of the members, was gradually reworked in the process. At the end of our meetings we registered controlled anxiety, with better self-control in each of them, a result achieved not only with individual work, but also with group methods and influences.

At the beginning of the joint work, the young people shared that they were often defined as failing and unsuccessful (by family, teachers, employers), and this had built in them a feeling of inferiority, low self-esteem, aggressive attitudes or despair. At the end of the joint meetings, we found that young people firmly believed in their dreams and boldly planned their future, relying on themselves, their skills and friendships. Women also experienced a kind of metamorphosis: many of them managed to process their verbal aggression and channel their emotions into constructive actions, both during the sessions and in their daily lives. Entering their mother's positions early, they managed to see in themselves not only the mother and the housewife, but also to acquaint the woman in themselves with their desires and dreams for a better future – their own and their children's.

12.2 Achievements of the group from the village of Brestovitsa, Borovo municipality

Group dynamics

Even in the first meetings of the mentors with the group, good connections were found between the participants, probably determined by the small town where the young people lived.

Here the processes of functioning in the group seemed to merge, which foreshadowed monotonous group work and fruitless actions. Analysing the group dynamics and the limited intellectual and social knowledge of the participants, the mentors changed the methods and relied on practical activities (art therapy and occupational therapy), in which the participants showed their strengths – talent (music), dexterity, and values. The goal was again to develop in them an overall positive view of their lives, and to find personal prospects for development. The practical work with the group created in the participants the feeling of realization, developed their self-confidence, and gave them a direction for future development.

Individual achievements

Although group work was predominant before the individual meetings, personal achievements were also found in this group. Each of them knew more about themselves – their strengths, the skills that make it valuable and distinguish it from others and can be presented

through them. They demonstrated more confidence and ingenuity. Two of the young people were successfully placed in non-system part-time work, which affects their confidence and self-confidence. They all shared their dreams and desires much more boldly, and could set goals and look for real ways to make them come true.

12.3 Conclusions

In order to determine whether a newly introduced innovation is effective, the definition of “efficiency” must be considered. According to the existing definition, the concept of “efficiency” is defined as the degree to which the objectives set in the innovation are achieved by comparing actual and expected results. As a concept, efficiency does not take into account the amount of resources used (financial costs, human resources, investments, etc.) to achieve the goal. For this reason, all developments in the implementation of the innovation *Matti – Men’s journeys to work* under the project № BG05M9OP001-4.003-0021 *NEETsLAB – Mentoring through Innovation – a Mission Possible*, funded by the procedure *Transnational Partnerships, OP Human Resources Development 2014–2020*, are aimed at analysing and measuring the degree of goals achieved in comparing the actual and expected results of the mentoring process of inactive young people.

In order to define an innovation as successfully introduced, the objectives initially introduced must be achieved. For this purpose, when measuring the results achieved, the achieved goals of the two groups are first compared – the group from Sredna Kula and the group from Brestovitsa. The parameters by which they are compared are based on:

- the number of achieved personal goals – the achieved personal goals of each young person – which are achieved, which are not and why;
- the number of young people registered in the DBT during or after the mentoring process;
- the number of young people employed as a result of the mentoring process;
- the number of young people who started looking for work as a result of the mentoring process;
- the number of young people who started education or training as a result of the mentoring process.

In addition to quantitatively, the results are measured qualitatively, namely a comparison of the motivation of the participants at the beginning and end of the mentoring process. It is normal for young people to be timid, insecure, and demotivated for various reasons when joining the mentoring process. It is important to analyse the result achieved in this direction with each young person.

Measuring the results achieved is an integral part of any innovation. The process is the ultimate tool that determines whether an experiment is successful or unsuccessful.

The current innovation and its application are considered successful, as it has achieved an increase in the motivation of young people, increasing their interest in acquiring new knowledge throughout life, as well as taking “their lives into their own hands”, i.e. they themselves have come to the conclusion that in order to achieve their goals, they should make an effort and be willing to leave their NEET status. In addition, two persons have started work as a result of the project, one person is registered in the Labor Office, one person has taken measures to return to education, and one person has taken measures to start working with an employment contract.

13 RESULTS OF THE SECOND INNOVATION – NEW INSTRUMENTS: INNO_MENTOR

Snezhina Churova & Valeria Nikolova

The innovation *INNO_MENTOR* was created through the project *NEETS LAB – Mentoring through Innovations – Mission Possible*, implemented in Bulgaria from the NGO Peonies, and funded by the operational programme *Human Development Resources*. The innovation is actually a new “model for the transfer of intelligence between generations”, which is a set of three tools tested and applied to 21 inactive young people from Bulgaria:

Tool 1, *Individual digital mentoring*, is an online mentoring of inactive young people, provided through the platforms Facebook and Discord with the participation of young people and mentors. Here young people can communicate with their mentors remotely, both in groups and individually. The purpose of the tool is to create a comfortable online space for activating and motivating young people. The tool also contributes to the development of individual mentoring from a distance by using the modern knowledge of the digitalized youth society, namely social networks. It has become a successful means of communication between mentors and young people.

When testing the tool, its testing contributed to achieving the main goal set in its development, namely to make participants feel more free to share and communicate with their mentors without making personal contact with the other person. During the individual digital mentoring, the participants were able to relax and feel the mentors as their friends, to whom they can not only “cry”, but from whom they can also seek assistance, advice or recommendations.

The results achieved from testing the tool were:

- 1) Creating a new approach to individual digital mentoring, using the Facebook and Discord platforms in a different and non-traditional way
- 2) Accumulating new knowledge and skills for handling both platforms
- 3) Creating habits in the target groups for adherence to a schedule
- 4) Creating an ability in young people to understand and manage emotions
- 5) Creating a friendly relationship between mentors and young people, which contributed to the free sharing of information by young people about self-knowledge – in-

- dividuality, potential, opportunities, hidden resources, desires, aspirations, dreams
- 6) Learning new techniques for dealing with conflicts and challenges and finding creative solutions
 - 7) Developing independence and responsibility
 - 8) Developing new skills for fast and effective learning from home based on setting individual tasks by mentors
 - 9) Receiving emotional support
 - 10) Acquiring a sense of security and support.

Tool 2, *Interest Groups*, was implemented through three groups: a photography group, a culinary group and an art activities group.

Photography group

The photography group aims to engage young people in photography and turn the hobby into a profession. Thanks to the tool, young people learned new knowledge of photography.

The testing of the tool started with a lecture element, for which purpose presentation materials were made in an interactive way, including not “dry” material, but the active participation of the young people themselves. Through the lecture element, the participants gained new knowledge about the art of photography, and learned the basic concepts, types of colours and the role of light. They were able to apply all their accumulated knowledge in practice under the guidance of their mentors directly in the open field. The young people managed to escape from their anxiety and problems, as well as from their grey daily lives, photographing what made them happy and useful for themselves.

Through the art of photography, the participants were able to recreate many of the things and themes that excited them and that they could hardly express in any other way. Through art, young people expressed themselves in a way that was uncharacteristic of people with their status, allowing others around them to get to know them better and sometimes to see and touch things that would otherwise remain hidden or not so well expressed. The photography helped them to “bring out” themselves and to express some rather destructive thoughts, feelings and fantasies, without actually harming the others in the group. The participants shared that sometimes it is photography that saves them from themselves without even realizing it, and sometimes it becomes a comforting haven for others who find support in it.

The results achieved from the applied tool were:

- 1) Accumulating new knowledge and practical skills in the target groups
- 2) Learning a new approach to self-expression through photography
- 3) Motivation of the participants to start a craft with photography
- 4) Acquiring new knowledge for handling digital cameras
- 5) Acquiring new knowledge for creating creative photos at home with the tools at hand.

Culinary group

In the culinary group, young people learn new knowledge and gain practice in the field of cooking. Through cooking, the participants developed their hidden potential and passion for gastronomy, creating truly delicious culinary masterpieces.

During the lecture part of the sessions, the individuals managed to master the theories and basic subtleties of the culinary art:

- the choice of a varied, nutritious and healthy menu, which should be consistent with the capabilities of the household, desires, needs and the case for which the food is prepared, as well as people's health;
- planning activities for processing and creating dishes, which is an important condition before starting cooking;
- the appropriate combination of flavours and spices in the dishes, as well as the combination of food and drink, which is extremely important;
- preparing, garnishing and serving dishes in an aesthetic way that remains a lasting memory for guests;
- when opening a restaurant or working in cooking, people who decide to taste the menu are called guests, not customers, because a customer is a person from whom you take something, and a guest is a person to whom you give.

The mentors were able to show the young people the connection between nutrition and health and from which food product what useful substances they could extract. In today's fast-paced world, we are used to eating fast and not when we are hungry, but when our senses are irritated and perhaps that is where the thread between the unconscious choice of what food to choose is broken. Maybe when we manage to connect consciousness with unconscious choice, we will then choose our food intelligently. This choice is very responsible for us and our loved ones and professional chefs have a great responsibility for what they feed their guests.

During the practical part of the sessions, participants had the opportunity to demonstrate what they had learned to the extent that the mentors had cooking equipment, due to the lack of such in the current project. For the practice, the mentors brought their own cooking appliances so that the young people could apply the maximum of their acquired knowledge in practice. In each practical lesson, all anti-epidemic measures were observed – disinfection, wearing masks, tasting only with disposable utensils, after which these utensils were discarded, and the wearing of gloves.

As a result of the culinary group, the most important thing that the individuals were able to learn was not to memorize a recipe, but to be disciplined. Personal discipline is the most important quality a chef should possess. Without it, chaos occurs in the kitchen, which is transmitted to others.

The results included:

- acquiring new knowledge and skills for the art of “cooking”;
- practical culinary skills;
- creating self-discipline in each of the young people;
- the desire of the participants for future realization in the field of cuisine;
- a positive influence on the psyche and emotions of the participants;
- creating a sense of inner satisfaction, making participants feel useful to themselves and others by what they do.

Art activities group

In the group of art activities young people learned new knowledge of *découpage*, and in working with paper and origami. The acquired skills were the basis and opportunity to start your own small business in the field of social entrepreneurship.

Tool 3, *club houses* was the third tool in this project. The club house is a place where young people with disabilities gather, gain professional qualifications and work skills and are provided with the necessary support for their entry into the labour market. A demonstration of the implemented project of a club house was held with five young people with disabilities, visiting the RALIZ-BALIZ centre, according to an innovatively developed programme.

The club house is an important tool for self-knowledge and self-expression of young people, the so-called “insight”. An atmosphere of tolerance, trust and attention to the inner soul world of the respective youths is offered.

During the testing of the innovation, the experts came to the conclusion that the life of a young person with a disability differs very much among different young people. This depends mainly on the psychological support of the family and the suitability of the young person to “live with the difference” in relation to other young people of the same or close to their age. The psychology of a young person with a disability does not differ much from the psychology of a healthy young person. Like any young person, they go through the same processes, but with a different rhythm. For this reason, the activities tested in the club house are designed in a way suitable both for young people with disabilities and those without.

The results show that through the club houses young people with disabilities managed to restore their sense of self-worth and to realize a wider repertoire of protective-adaptive reactions. Participants were able to unleash their deeply buried potential and bring it to the surface through a series of fun exercises and games. The participants managed to acquire new knowledge about various job opportunities and trainings, which is the main goal of the club houses. They are an effective solution to the problems that young people with disabilities have in trying to live fully.



Picture 1. Project visit to Kouvola, Finland 2/2019: from left Yanka Vasileva, Snezhina Churova and Denislav Nikolov. Photo: Yanka Vasileva

14 EPILOGUE

The most essential issue in the youth mentoring process is trust. Without reciprocal trust between the mentor and mentee, discussions decrease.

Remember that the basement of dialogical equal conversation is built during the first encounters.

Be patient.



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- 1 *Srujal Shah - Kari Dufva: CFD modeling of airflow in a kitchen environment. Towards improving energy efficiency in buildings. 2017.*
- 2 *Elias Altarriba: Öljyn leviämisen estimointi arviointitaulukoiden avulla osana operatiivista öljyntorjuntatyötä Saimaalla. 2017.*
- 3 *Elina Havia - Jari Käyhkö (toim.): Fotoniikkasensori- ja korkean teknologian kuvantamisen demonstrointi metsäbiojalostamon hallintaan (FOKUEDEMO). 2017.*
- 4 *Justiina Halonen - Emmi Rantavuo - Elias Altarriba: Öljyntorjuntakoulutuksen ja -osaamisen nykytila. SCAROIL-hankkeen selvitys öljyntorjunnan koulutus-tarpeista. 2017.*
- 5 *Veli Liikanen - Arto Pesola: Physical fun: exercise, social relations and learning in SuperPark. 2018.*
- 6 *Timo Hantunen - Petri Janbunen (toim.): Sote-alan videoneuvottelujärjestelmien käytettävyys ja käyttöönotto. 2018.*
- 7 *Pekka Turkki: Selluloosa ja selluloosajohdannaiset elintarvikkeissa. 2018.*
- 8 *Elias Altarriba - Minna Pelkonen - Jukka-Pekka Bergman: Laadullinen tapaus-tutkimus opetusresurssien nopean ja voimakkaan vähenemisen vaikutuksista korkeakouluopetukseen. 2018.*
- 9 *Sari Tuuva-Hongisto: Nuorten syrjäytyminen ja alueellisen eriytymisen vähentäminen. Tutkimuskirjallisuuteen ja –raportteihin pohjautuva kartoitus. 2019.*

- 10 *Susan Eriksson*: Digitalisaatio nuorisotyön opetuksessa. 2019.
- 11 *Susan Eriksson – Sari Tuuva-Hongisto*: Nuorisotyön digitalisaatio 2030. ”Meidän tulisi osata tarjota nuorille työkaluja maailmaan, jota me emme vielä itse tunne.” 2019.
- 12 *Susan Eriksson*: Digital applications in youth employment services. 2019.
- 13 *Hilla Sumanen – Jaakko Harkko – Jouni Lahti – Eeva-Leena Ketonen – Olli Pietiläinen – Anne Kouvonen*: Nuorten työntekijöiden työkyky ja työterveyshuollon palvelujen käyttö. 2020.
- 14 *Marja Moisala (toim.)*: Paikkariippumattomuus nuorten tulevaisuuden palveluissa maaseudulla. 2020.
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