

REACHING DESIRED

IMPACT THROUGH

MENTORING



KING BAUDOUIN
FOUNDATION



EUROPEAN
CENTER *for*
EVIDENCE-BASED
MENTORING

PUTTING RESEARCH *into* ACTION

INTRODUCTION

In the period 2016 – 2020, 19 mentoring programmes from around Europe shared the ambition to learn from each other, to grow in quality and to reach the impact mentors and mentees choose for. This network carried the name: **'European Learning Network of Mentoring Programmes for Migrants'**, supported by the King Baudouin Foundation (BE) and led by the European Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring.

During the activities such as learning seminars, job shadowing, and study visits, participating mentoring practitioners shared highly valuable insights with each other. This led to a higher level of quality and expertise of the mentoring practitioners and programmes. As the network came to an end, there was a common need for a practical end publication highlighting the results. For this reason, ECEBM conducted interviews with mentoring professionals of 11 programmes in the network. The core of the conversations was to answer the question: **which successful, practical intervention does your mentoring programme use that leads to reaching the desired impact?**

The outcomes of the interviews were analysed by a team of mentoring professionals at ECEBM, and they were translated to a summary of practical interventions per programme. The interventions were supported by testimonials from practitioners, mentors, and mentees. The interventions were divided into two categories:

- Interventions focusing on the relationship
- Interventions focusing on the programme/structure

We hope that after reading the results, you will become inspired to read more about the context of these statements and interventions. The conversations with the mentoring practitioners can be found in part 2 of this publication.

On behalf of the European Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring team,
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*The Baudouin Learning Network involved 19 mentoring programmes in the course of 4 years. They are mentoring programmes that (partly) serve people with immigrant background in Europe. 12 programmes were invited to participate in the end publication, out of which 1 mentoring programme from outside the network in Belgium.

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PROGRAMMES MAP

European Learning Network of Mentoring Programmes for Migrants



PROJECT FACTS & FIGURES



Years of peer learning



Participating Programmes

ACTIVITIES OF THE LEARNING NETWORK

- European Mentoring Summit events in Leeuwarden (NL), Berlin (DE) and online
- Learning Seminars in Paris (FR) and Hamburg (DE)
- Mentoring Short Course in Leeuwarden (NL)
- Mentoring Short Course in Boston (US)
- Ongoing job shadowing and study visits

"I'm touched by a simple detail like when a mentee says "you are MY mentor", "This is MY mentor!" or "this is MY student". The "MY" refers to possession, by saying this, the mentee understands that the mentor belongs to him/her, the mentor is there for the mentee. And that reaffirms the space of freedom and belonging essential in a mentee to develop and embrace the mentoring action. The "MY" is a synonym of success, it makes it real!"

RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTIONS

- Define your (pedagogical) goals and how the matching can address them.
- Train and support your mentors the way that suits them.

PROGRAMME INTERVENTIONS

- Identify essential steps that made your programme successful.
- Accept that in social mentoring, you cannot control everything.
- Set up quality impact indicators, they must be as simple as possible and easy to evaluate.
- Communicate your quality impact to stakeholders, show your expertise.

"The great things we hear for instance is that the mentees want to become mentors at some point in their life."

RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTIONS

- Keep in close contact with the mentors.
- See to it that mentors realise that what they do makes a change.
- With younger mentors, follow up with the mentors a bit closer.

PROGRAMME INTERVENTIONS

- Organise contact between the mentors and relevant professionals.
- Do not go for quantity measurements but quality.
- Be open and flexible in the programme. That is what reality asks.
- Organise activities around mentoring.

DUO FOR A JOB

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM



“Mentees with a migration background are particularly attracted by 50+ mentors because it offers a guarantee of experience, availability and intergenerational exchanges.”

RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTIONS

- Invest in the skills and competencies of the mentors.

PROGRAMME INTERVENTIONS

- Be complimentary to existing programmes.
- Keep your mentors close.
- Make partners also owners of the programme.
- Build your mentoring model from the starting point of the target groups.

“One of the mentees with a refugee background has eventually got a job at a big company and said to me: A lot of people in the Netherlands only want to help when you have your green card, only then you will have access. Your organization already helped when I didn’t have a green card, this made a big difference!”

RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTIONS

- Offer guidance in setting learning goals.
- Manage expectations with clear communication.
- Offer tangible language to your mentors for talking about diversity.
- Make diversity and inclusion a topic of conversation with mentors.

PROGRAMME INTERVENTIONS

- Assess the expectations every year.
- Be flexible, but closely follow up a change in approach.
- To reach a systematic impact, match multiple mentors from the same company.

"A while ago I got to know a girl from the football group we provide in a cooperating primary school, who was always seeking attention and made it hard to play as a team. Her mentor was really giving the attention but also showing her her boundaries. After the 8 months our program ran, we asked both about their experiences. The mentor answered: ...we also had some difficulties with each other but we solved them together. She listened to what I told her about also taking care of other peoples' feelings and needs. We also talked about the positive developments she made and I encouraged her. She now says the mentor is the most important person after her parents."

RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTIONS

- Keep your mentors close through group activities and make room for exchange.
- Collaborate with schools and other organisations.
- Plan your actions with and not around your mentors and mentees.

PROGRAMME INTERVENTIONS

- Be flexible. Provide a fixed programme for the tandems but find suitable solutions for the mentees' and mentors' needs.
- It is all about relationships, but do not go in too deep. Beware, keep to your limit.

MENTOR-UP PADOVA, ITALY



"Due to COVID-19 in 2020 we met the teachers in zoom together with the mentors, only at the end of the programme, but there was no possibility of organising the meeting with the mentees. The teachers reported the progress noted in some mentees, some engaged more in homework and following the lessons, other mentees were less shy, more open to dialogue with their peers and with the teachers. Many mentees continued to stay in contact with their mentors even after the programme ended and - as soon as the lockdown was lifted - they met. Even with the limitations imposed by the lockdown, they consider mentoring as a positive experience. Now they have an extra friend with whom to talk about their experiences, their difficulties, the discomfort suffered due to COVID-19."

RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTIONS

- Make mentors aware of the difficulties multicultural kids can experience in their daily life.
- Make mentors aware of cultural differences by organising personal contact with people from different cultures.

PROGRAMME INTERVENTIONS

- Keep on trying to find different tools and instruments that support the mentor.
- Keep in close contact with the teachers to exchange different points of view.

“What stuck to me as a coordinator is how often mentors said what a revelation it was how much strengths and talents the mentees with a different cultural background have.”

RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTIONS

- Focus on the strengths, skills, and competencies of the mentees as a starting point for the relationship.
- Do not just focus on the goals set at the beginning of the relationship, make room for other things that happen in the life of the mentee.

PROGRAMME INTERVENTIONS

- Organize your communication professionally.
- Be visible to the outside.
- Tell the stories of the mentees and mentors.



“Thank you, I feel human again instead of a number.”

RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTIONS

- Take time to get to know the mentees.
- Work with concrete, tangible goals.
- Focus on action instead of analysing.

PROGRAMME INTERVENTIONS

- Speed-date matching worked for us, but work with predetermined parameters.

PEOPLE IN NEED

PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC



"I do have one 'tandem' and I really like that they both said that they are at the point where they are learning from each other. The mentee was really happy that the mentor trusted him enough to take him to skateparks and show the mentor how to skateboard. Even though the mentor was an older and stricter man who works at a bank. They really trust each other because they would never do this at the beginning of their relationship."

RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTIONS

- We lowered our image of what the goal should be. It can be small goals.
- Be flexible in setting goals, it forms and comes from mentees' wishes and views while being supported by the mentor.
- Make both mentor and mentee aware of the goal.
- Be with the mentees at their own pace.

PROGRAMME INTERVENTIONS

- Communicate in the language of the people you want to reach.
- Build a small community of volunteers that share with, and motivate each other.

“At Punt de Referència they look for a reference person who can help you with what you need. When I go out with my mentor, I feel I have a person close to my heart who makes me feel like a member of the family.”

RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTIONS

- Make longer matches for the younger people.
- Put the effort into the quality of the closure of the match.
Consider developing a ritual.
- Give mentors feedback.
- Work with recognition to make matches.

PROGRAMME INTERVENTIONS

- Realize that mentoring is a tailor-made affair. Acknowledge differences.
- Bond with the mentee as a coordinator.

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REACHING DESIRED IMPACT THROUGH MENTORING

PART 2: CONVERSATIONS WITH MENTORING PRACTITIONERS

What can you tell us about your mentoring programme?

I work at AFEV, which is a French association. The name of my program is, I would say it is a mentoring program. And the name in French is "AFEV" and now we are switching to calling it Mentoring Program. So now we are talking about mentoring all the time. We have existed for thirty years now. And then we have two hundred and fifty employees all around France. Over three hundred and fifty cities we run the program. We have fifty-five centres, like an office, and then we mentor eight thousand kids over the year.

How is your program financed?

We are 90% funded by the public service. Let's say that for a local team to exist, it has to be supported locally. The financial office will not pay for a local program. So the local programs will have to be funded locally with public investments, with local communities and with the private sector as well. But nationally we are funded 90% public with for example the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth. We are 10% private companies, like BNP Paribas or the National Railway company or private foundations.

Also, I know you are working with digital tools. Can you explain further?

Yeah, because when I arrived at AFEV the main goal was also to transform the program. To make it something more, let's say, structured. Because each local team was developing his way. So nationally we needed to have some guidance and some more guidelines and tools that all employees could use on a normal basis. So one of my main jobs was to homogenize. To make it equal everywhere so every employee was using the same tool to identify, to target the kids. To match them, to follow them and to train the mentors, etc. It was a big phase to create these tools for employees, mentors, mentees and families.

What's the goal of your Mentoring Program?

Well, we help kids fighting against school dropouts. So the main goal is to prevent school dropouts. It's hard to prevent something that never happened, so it's hard to evaluate. But the point is mainly to help them be self-confident and make them feel that they can achieve whatever they want to achieve in their lives. Most of them are migrants. They live in disabled neighbourhoods. They have sometimes big families within small living spaces. Also, our Mentoring Program is in-home, so we work a lot with the families and the mentor goes inside the home of the mentee. That's the occasion to work with the mother, the father, the big brother, the small sister and also to connect this family with the school.

Why do you think mentoring is important?

In so many ways. It's important. Here for example mentoring is important to make mentors discover a new neighbourhood, a new social environment. There is a lot of judgement on something which they don't know. Mentoring is a tool to break some of the stereotypes. So a lot of mentors with mentoring discover something new, they learn from each other. It is a perfect tool for the kids who need someone that isn't family, is not a teacher, is not someone outside his system. So it's like a brother that will not be a part of the family. It is a special link that creates between them that is very important and very rich. But mentoring is important in many ways. It's just like huge support to someone that didn't have the chance to do it.

What small changes did you make to the program that had a big impact on the desired impact?

Well a lot, but it's not as much as structural changes. Like I didn't change the way things were happening between a mentor and a mentee in a sense. This is unique between a mentor and a mentee. Each one has his own. But with all the tools, we started the standardization of the tools let's say. We helped a lot by having a program that can be reproduced everywhere. Because we identify like mentoring in the US. We identify what is necessary to be respected for a program to be successful. So we identify all the steps and what you need as a mentoring practitioner and professional. What do you need to respect to make it happen the best way possible? We also learned that you can not control everything. That there's a lot of things you might have done correctly and you might have invested a lot of energy in it, but most of the time it's not. Perhaps it didn't work because the family moved away or because the kid is in a too difficult situation to be helped by a mentor. He needs professional assistance. Or maybe it is because the match didn't match. I would say that identifying the key performance indicator (KPI) of mentoring was very successful for us. In that way, we could easily identify where the problem was in our employees and local teams and help them build a stronger program to achieve their goals.

The KPI's would be like 90% of your mentors are trained. How many mentors should repeat their mentoring actions one year to another. We identify some important items. That if you respect those items you will have long-lasting programs with a big impact. If you train your mentors well and how will you train them, because they are students and you can't train them during the week because they will be studying and they will not be attending your training. So you have to do it in a fun way. Maybe grabbing some beers and train them and being in their mood. So speaking their language. We identify the same for each action. For example, how to reach out to a family. What is the best way to catch the attention of the family. So we have this, this, this and that. So we have different items that we know will make the most out of it, if we respect those items.

You also said you are looking for the individual needs of the mentors, of the families and also of the mentees?

Yes, of course. When a kid first enters the program he has an evaluation. So we have to know for example how does he feel regarding his methodology at home, at work. Like how does he work? How does he feel about school? Does he like to go to school? Maybe he is scared to go to school? Things like that. And then at the end of the programme, we ask the same questions. And then we see at the beginning he was here, at the end he is was here. And thanks to his mentor he has won all of that. So we have this impact evaluation.

That made a big change in how you reach your impact?

Yes, and that was of them. And for our stakeholders, it was very interesting because we were able to measure something that didn't happen. As I was saying it is very difficult to measure something that didn't happen. Like a minority report. How can we prevent a crime before it's happening? These were kind of the things that helped us show our impact in a very very practical way. And the evaluator is also the teacher. So we ask the teacher if the kid feels more comfortable at school, does he speak more, does he participate more, does he have nice behaviour with the colleagues, etc. So this is an impact that we measure and after we can also show it to stakeholders and in our annual report. It is very precise.

So you ask your mentors if their mentee reach their learning goals?

We have five indicators. Three of them are evaluated by the teacher who has identified the kid. And the two others are evaluated by the mentor. We ask ourselves who is the more legit to evaluate the mentor? So in some of the cases, it is something you could evaluate in school, so that's the teachers' side. And two others are something you can evaluate at home. So it's the family side, the mentor side. For the mentor, we evaluate how is the family connected with the school? Is the family following the school correctly? Do they feel like they belong to school? Because we noticed that most of the families we mentor are afraid of school because they feel that they don't belong there. So that makes a break, a gap between the school and the family. So we try to build on this gap. And that is one of the indicators. The second indicator for the mentors is "does the mentee have the correct methodology at home?" Does he do his homework, does he have an organisation or a table where he can work? Does he keep his agenda on time? Thing like that. So whats the attitude towards the school homework for example. And the three other indicators are motivation and willingness to learn. Does the kid show that he has improved the way he learns and why he wants to learn. The other one is mobility and cultural opening. Is he open to the others? Does he know how to be in society and develop himself? And the other one is "what's his relationship to school?" Does he like to go to school etc.

If you could go back in time and give yourself advice from when you just started working with mentoring, what would it be?

Not trying to invent the wheel twice. Like there is a lot of things existing for mentoring, a lot. And each mentoring program wants to build its own. So my advice will be to be collective, try to use what already exists and maybe make it better but not on my own. With the others. That will be my advice. Why would you want to invent the wheel again? It works fine. But we have noticed that a lot with our local teams, because at my position it's not like I'm branding the program. I make the program run for others. And that's interesting because in the 550 local teams you see that each local team develops their own thing and I'm like "hey guys I'm doing this, so why don't you use it." Because it's a proof of concept. It has worked and it suites you, so use it. But they need time to reappropriate themselves, the tool. I think we need to find a balance between inventing something that already exists and investing some time in the appropriation of the tool already existing. But you need time to know how things work and inventing is a process that helps you understand how things work, but at the same time, it's a very time-consuming process.

Can I say, if I try to summarize, you need time to appropriate the existing materials to the needs of your program?

Yes, exactly. It's finding a compromise between the learning time you need. What I want to say is that inventing again the wheel for a tool is a natural process for someone who runs a program, to understand the program and make it better. Because it's like "oh there is this training, I want to do it to my mentors" but I don't like this one, I'm gonna do another one. But it is a new one that is similar to the old one, but you made it your own. So it's better because you made it your own. It's an in-between between this new tool invented from something that was already existing and the process you use to arrive at this tool. It's how you give yourself some time to search for the existing and how do you use it in a way that adapts to your program.

What makes your program different from other programs?

I think it's the in-home aspect. That we get to be inside of peoples houses. And being inside a house, you see a lot of things. Violence, insalubrity. And other things very positive that the school doesn't see. Like maybe this kid is struggling in class because his mother is sick and he has to be taking care of the three other little brothers. So I think it's important because we don't take the kid in his individuality. We take it in his whole social environment. Which sometimes is not the case. At least here in France school is a very individualizing process and then sometimes those kids need to be seen with a bit more perspective.

What do you offer your mentees?

We represent a community of other students to get access to. We offer them training on social inequalities, education and we offer them the ability to be a mentor of course. And then I would say that a lot of cultural activities as well that they do with the mentees. Because we organize, now with COVID it is going to be a little bit different, but we used to organize and still do like weekends, seminars, going to the zoo, going to the movies or going to the museum with the mentors and the mentees, and organizing events, etc. So we open them also to a new city because some of the students are new in the city. Because there is a lot of mobility in the French universities. There is a lot of mobility between the students, a bit like in Holland. So there are students who just got into a city and they want to discover it. And we also offer our mentors social assistance, because some of them are still struggling in their lives. There is not only the mentee that has problems, but also the mentor. So we offer them also guidance and consultation and professional orientation.

Does mentoring for people with a non-western background need a specific approach?

I would say no. I mean sometimes if you can speak the language it's better because that way you can make them understand easily some of the things. But no, I would say it's very rich to be also in a whole new perspective and it can put you straight into another mindset. And it can accelerate more easily the mutual discovery between the mentor and the mentee. Each one can bring who they are and make it together.

What elements do you think are most important to your mentoring work?

Right now it's the whole advocacy for mentoring with the French government because we want to advocate for mentoring to put it in another level as mentoring as also as a part of public policy. I don't know, everything is important, everything is special.

I also like that I heard you say advocacy, so to give it a more prominent place.

Yes. Right now with the COVID crisis, we have seen that inequality has increased. Kids are not going back to school right away. So we need the government to take action and I think that it's also the government's responsibility to take action on that and not only to the organisations like ours. So I think that right now it's important to take action and to put mentoring in a more public way with the government. Trying to build a plan to develop mentoring as a tool to fight against all sorts of inequalities that are increasing.

What is something a mentor or a mentee said to you that stuck with you?

A lot of things, It's hard to say. I like simple things when they say to you like "you are my mentor, this is my mentor!" and "this is my student". It's very simple but they feel that this person belongs in a way that they are together. It's very simple but it makes it real. The fact that "oh can I have my (first?) student this year as well?" and they are in a dynamic in that they have someone for themselves. That is very important because a lot of kids that we mentor they need that. They need this special attention that belongs to them. It's not to the little brother or big sister or whatever for the family. It's for them. It's their moment, their space and they create whatever they want within this space. That's about mentoring what I like.

What are your ambitions in the future for your program?

Hard to say because I'm living it. It will be with the advocacy aspect. I would love in a year or two a special policy that puts mentoring as a right to everyone. Everyone needs it because sometimes we also have to focus on the people that need it the most. All the young people who would like to reach out to a mentor has the right to do it and has the capacity and ability to do it let's say.

What can you tell us about your mentoring programme?

At the moment we have three programmes that involve mentoring in our organisation. The first one, the biggest and the oldest one, is Entendem which exists for more than twelve years. We have another programme that is called Prometeus, and the third one is called Zing. Basically, they all involve the same mentoring methodology. The difference is that they are focused on different targets regarding mentees. And also they have other actions around them that are different for each programme.

We are a team of six people who are mentoring managers or practitioners. And other people around that, who are also part of the team, help us with things like administration, communication or other actions that are also important.

We make about 150 matches annually. As you know we have a delegation here in Barcelona and another one in Valencia so if you add up both I would say we arrive at 200 more or less. The Valencia project is smaller and newer but it is growing very fast.

How is your programme financed?

Mostly public funding, but also small private funding like foundations. Public funding comes from the administration of Catalonia, Spain. And I would say if I had to describe it, it is very diversified, meaning we have many different sources of funding because it's so unstable, especially here in Spain with the economic crisis and everything. You have to make sure it's diversified so you don't depend on only one funder. Our funders give so little money that you need to find many of them to survive.

The good news is that the Catalan government has become more or less aware of what mentoring is, so we have a specific line of funding for mentoring, which comes from the regional department of immigration. Gradually, I think our funding will get better because mentoring is more considered. For instance, now, the department of education has realized that with all this pandemic and virtual learning situation, mentors are critical role models. So I think that we are going to have an improvement in funding, except that we are entering a very terrible economic crisis now. But besides that, the Catalan administration is every day more aware of how our methodology works.

How are you reaching that goal and is it a conscious goal to make the government more aware of the mentoring methodology?

We are very proactive, I would say that we have a very strong investment in communication. There is a Spanish platform that is called Coordinadora Mentoría Sociale. They do strong work of awareness-raising and lobbying politicians and stuff like that.

But for instance, we never stop making contact with politicians to make sure that they know what we are doing because we are considered a pretty small organisation. But we have been working for a few years and we have affected more than a thousand kids and it's a shame to not be known for that. So we do quite a lot of lobbying, although we are a small organisation and that is important to us.

What is the goal of your mentoring programme?

The three programmes that I mentioned before are targeted to prevent school drop out in different stages of education. Entandem is aimed at students that are at primary and secondary school, which means up to 16 years old in Spain. We keep them motivated and engaged in school without addressing directly the academic issues. We work on their wellbeing, critical thinking, autonomy for decision making, self-knowledge, motivation, etc. by creating a bond with a positive reference, a mentor. For this specific programme the mentors are quite young, so people from 18 to 22 years. We accept mentors up to 30 years old but it's an important goal that they are young people. We do this so the mentees don't see them as old, professional, or controlling figures. That's it regarding Entandem.

The other programmes that I mentioned are more or less the same. They focus on avoiding students to drop out but after finishing secondary school. So one of them, Prometeus is for 16 to 19 year olds who come from environments where it is not very common to go to university. So the social demographic areas in this case Barcelona that have a very low ratio of university students. In Spain when you finish secondary school you choose either the academic path or you choose a profession.

With several actions including mentoring we are accompanying them in the process of making decisions and having the stress of school and motivation to go to the university. We also accompany them during the first year of university, which is quite hard normally and causes a lot of dropouts.

And the third one 'Zing' is aimed at students who go for the vocational path. They finish secondary school and go for professional training. I would say as a population they are even more at risk for drop out because of their background and history so it's easy that they end up with no high education at all. We keep them on track with their vocational education and motivation. For these two programmes the mentors are a little older than for Entandem. The mentees for these programmes are 16 to 20 years old so our mentors have to be a little older.

Do you see any difference between these programmes in how you reach those goals and impacts?

Yes, I would say that the main differences are the other actions that go around mentoring. The mentoring methodology is the same. It's making a relationship with two people who have things in common so they can make a good bond and meet up regularly.

They all meet up once a week. With the younger mentees, we probably are a bit more protective or organized, we follow up with the mentors a bit closer. The mentees are younger so they need a little bit more support. With the older mentees, the matches organize more by themselves and they are expected to meet once a week as well but the monitoring is not as close. For Prometeus, more actions support the process that has to do with academic orientations, applying for university, etc. along with other actions.

Why do you think mentoring is important?

It is important because it's a tool that's very helpful for certain types of people. There are other very powerful methods and tools but this one has the specificity to address the person as she/he is. It is very much adaptive to who you are and it is not pre-designed. So the mentor is there to provide an intervention that is specifically made for the mentee. That's good because there are many kids and teenagers, and they are very diverse. But that means for schools it is challenging. What I find very powerful in mentoring is that I think that it can address kids that are otherwise invisible for some problems. They are not the most disruptive. When you ask schools to send kids to our programmes the schools mostly send males with 'disruptive behaviour'. And these kids normally have many options that are focused on them. But there are a bunch of kids that are invisible because they don't behave so badly or they don't have the worst grades at the end of the year. But they may be in the process of disengaging from school because they don't speak too much, they don't have many friends or they can't relate very well to adults. I think mentoring is great for this profile of kids. Kids who have a personal relationship with someone who cares and is not going to judge them. They approach them as they are and be there for them, it's very useful. And also I think that mentoring is as useful for mentors as it is for mentees. We work with young mentors who sometimes don't even know themselves very well yet. To be responsible for someone else is also an experience of knowing your limitations/strengths. We love the feeling that good matches and growth gives us. We don't see mentors as an extension of our organisation, of course, they are part of the organisation but they are also beneficiaries of our programme. We see the problems of solidarity among young people, who have different lives and we provoke them to cross their lives.

What do you mean exactly?

What we see in the young volunteers is that they are willing to engage in something. And even more in these times of uncertainty as nothing is clear for them. I see 15 years olds who know nothing about their future and it's something specific you can do in your everyday life to make an impact and to be useful. It's not always easy but it's rewarding. It is great to have someone waiting for you to see you every week and that you feel that you're there for each other. Of course, the mentee is central, but I also think it is nice for the mentors most of the time.

What small changes did you make that had a big impact on reaching your desired impact?

I think one of the big treats of our programmes is that we have a very close and strong relationship with our mentors. Although it's a big number of volunteers, they all know how to reach us every day of the week. They know that if they have any doubts they can come to us, they all pass compulsory training. We create several spaces for them to meet up with us. This treat of our programmes is this close relationship between all the actors. It is not a change that we made but came naturally. It makes a difference if they feel that they are doing something small, but it is intertwined in a network of people who care for that. For instance, once every three months we sit together with mentors of a certain area of the city and the professors, teachers, or social workers who know the kids and the families well. And we do like a follow up for the mentoring process, we revise and give some advice on the mentoring objectives. That makes them feel more important as well, and of course, the information they provide as mentors is very useful for all the other professionals. So I think this coordination is rich and useful for all the participants. To me mentoring by itself doesn't work, it works because there are other professional interventions. To me, one dilemma or question that many people pose is doing something with volunteers that is an issue for professionals. Social workers, professionals, and schools are dedicated to this, but what we always say the work of volunteers is very different. The kind of approach, the kind of relationship is different, so we have to do more together and complement each other. It is not that volunteers are doing the job of the professionals.

So you say mentoring by itself is not always enough. You need more actions and other tools to create the desired impacts?

Absolutely, that's how I see it. I don't know about other programmes. What I believe about impact in programmes like ours is that you can think about great tools for measuring. Maybe it is easier for other programmes that aim for professional integration or things you can count on. But for us, we are trying to reach goals that are not countable, like self-esteem. There are tools to evaluate that but it's not enough. Many times when we talk to the professionals to send the mentees to our programmes they say the changes are subtle, sometimes you notice them the next year and not at the moment. Tiny steps are hard to measure. Even though I come from a social sciences background we never managed to create the right tool.

What advice would you give yourself about mentoring if you could go back in time?

When I started working on this. I realized all of a sudden many things that I did not notice beforehand. Like the big energy and great will to participate that many young people have.

I was amazed by how many people just don't know how to participate. But if you give them a bit of structure they go for it and are amazing in compromising and being responsible for others and very creative. That was to be the very first and big impact. What advice I would give to myself, I have no idea? Maybe to be very flexible and open. Because we work with people and mentoring requires taking care of many realities of the family, volunteers, mentees, schools, etc. Those realities change every day and are very delicate, so you cannot provide a strategy that is very closed or strict. You are navigating, changing, and improvising all the time. You have to be very open and sensitive for that, for me that was a great learning experience. I think that most of the mentoring practitioners would say the same. You are working with humans and people by themselves are already very complex subjects and if you combine them it can create crazy reactions. Normally, but not always, positive crazy reactions. It entails a lot of patience and openness, creativity, and flexibility.

What makes your programme different from other programmes?

From what I've learned in networks is that our mentors are quite young compared to most of the programmes. Other programmes in the region are similar to ours but going around the world I see that most of the programmes are aimed at older more adult mentors. This means that we have to do some kind of extra effort, but it is also very rewarding. On the other hand; we are not an organisation that has mentees as our users. Many programmes are for instance in an institution that addresses migrants and also provides mentoring. We are created from the outside of schools and universities. All the mentees come to our organisation but they are not part of the organisation beforehand.

What do you offer your mentors?

To start with we offer them a first experience with engagement. I think that 40% of them are volunteering for the first time. It is a great responsibility. They feel safe because we accompany them along the way. We also offer them training. It doesn't only address mentoring but also poverty, educational inequalities, and analysis of the world along with mentoring. That creates great debates and alliances. Some of them become good friends because it's true that in some of the areas of the city where the mentoring matches gather, they gather together and then go out separately. When they end they come together as well, this creates new relationships. We offer young people an experience of volunteering, but also to be part of a network which is quite big. Also, we provide them with a safe experience to volunteer, but also to learn and practice competencies that are not taught at universities, like empathy or listening. I think we provide a big learning process for most of them. Some of them are already very responsible, skilled, and mature.

Does mentoring for people with a non-western background need a different approach?

What's important to me is the training, which raises a lot of awareness. Some don't need the training and some do, we create a space of debate of discussion. Of who we are in society, which privileges we have because we arrive at university for instance. To me what is important to create this debate beforehand is never mind the background of their potential mentees. 90% of their potential mentees are going to be very different from them in different aspects. Of course, some issues are difficult to deal with and have to be addressed. But it can be for a reason of culture or origin, economic or legal situation, health, violence, or addictions. The history of the mentees is confidential. So the mentors encounter a person and this person is free to present him/herself as he/she wants. But what is important also is that the mentors are ready, open, and respectful, then they can come to us with any doubts they have. As a principle, you cannot judge the ways that the families raise their kids, that goes with questions regardless of the background of the kid. In the discussions and conversations, many questions around culture and background arise.

What elements do you prioritize in your mentoring work?

We prioritize the fact that at the beginning the basic thing is to create a good and safe bond among the two people. Little by little the mentee gets more autonomy during the match, it's a learning process. We want to create a better situation for the mentee. One of the basics is the empowerment for the mentee to finish the process with more resources, critical thinking, better self-esteem, more information about their environment and of course motivation for their future.

What is something a mentor or a mentee said about the relationship that stuck to you?

The great thing we hear for instance is that the mentees want to become mentors at some point in their life. And that's of course satisfying. Also, one mother told us that she wanted to have a mentor as well. That happens more with families with a migration background. It feels rewarding to hear that the parents also want to mentor because they see their child grow.

What are your ambitions for the future of your programme?

We cannot provide our matches to everyone who needs them or deserves them. We make sure all participants are involved and will be engaged for at least a year and make use of the resource. But on the other hand, we make very little impact because we address so few mentees. My wish would be to have the right formula to make sure that we can maintain the same degree of quality of the following monitoring with the same care I think we do at the moment and at the same time address more kids.

What can you tell us about your mentoring programme?

Duo for a Job is a foundation. We have three legal identities with the same name "Duo for a Job". And we are a non-profit organization. We started in November 2012 and launched our operations in September 2013.

We have a team of 50 full-time employees spread in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. We are mainly Belgium as France and the Netherlands started recently. Altogether we have started 3000 mentoring matches and now we have a capacity of a thousand matches every year. Those are our goals for next year. We now have a capacity of 1,000 pairs and a pool of 1,000 active mentors.

Our financing model is about 40 per cent of the government, but when I speak of government I am speaking at the local level. We also have 60 per cent private, of which 25 foundations and 10 companies. Then you have 5 per cent of small donors that is still quite small at the moment.

What is the purpose of your mentoring programme?

The aim is to promote access to the labour market for young people from migration. Working on that gap that exists in the big cities between young people with and without a migration background. We also work with people over 50 as mentors. And then one last; by bringing together those two target groups, i.e. people over 50 with young people from migration, have the portability to build intercultural and intergenerational relationships and thus work on societies and social cohesion, stereotypes and getting to know their reality better. That is necessary for our big cities today.

Why do you think mentoring is important?

To answer that question it's important to start from; who are our target groups. For us it is quite specific, because we work with young people with a migration background outside Europe and on the other side only with people over 50. So when we start from the needs of the young people we work with, our mentees mainly lack social and cultural capital. What does that mean; social capital, access to networks, access to people in Belgium, to promote access to language skills and a certain vocabulary to be able to express yourself better, to build your networks, to know more people because that is how it often works to find a job and cultural capital, a lack of a cultural bridge, a lack of "what does the sector look like in my new city" and often it is very different in the city of origin. So their needs are there and through a broader cultural social capital, to get more access to it and have more capital in it to access the economic capital, which is to find a job here and earn money, take place in society. So we mainly respond to promoting social and cultural capital to gain access to the labour market, faster and easier.

What small changes have you made to your programme or major changes that significantly impacted the impact of your programme?

If you have to calculate the impact of the programme to see if that works, then of course employment, but that is not the only thing, if you have to draw up a programme, it is keeping mentors for as long as possible. Also important is the percentage of restarts and with us, 9 out of 10 after the supervision will start new supervision. Because our model is focused on the mentors, not on the mentees. Our first customers are the mentors and therefore training of 4 days (Which is now online with 9 modules). That is a huge investment, but a very useful afterwards. This means that we do not have to find a thousand new mentors every year. Every year we start with the current pool and make it bigger and so at the end of the ride, we can start up 8 thousand duos and in the future 100 thousand on an annual basis or something. So I think that's a really important point. Your model must remain complementary to the offer and if you want to make it sustainable and grow. You must especially respond to the mentors and everything you are going to invest in mentors to make them stronger, more autonomous, to file them, notes that they will build up new skills, which will make them stay longer and ultimately allow the mentee to enjoy them even more. So investing in the mentor is also investing in the mentee and I think it's a mistake for the project to do too many things around the mentees because a lot already exists, but also because they generally only stay 6 months and then it's done. The mentors are meant to stay for years and help make it big. And I also think that in mentoring it is important that the staff always remain the second line and that the mentor is always pushed to be the first line. So to be brief, to answer your question; adapting what we do for the impact always involves looking at what we can do more and do better for the mentors.

If you could go back in time when you just started and give yourself some advice, what would it be?

In the end we have, this is going to seem arrogant, but we have always been able to make the right choice. Not because we are smart or whatever, but because from the beginning we have adjusted as much as possible to the skills of the mentors and how big we have become. From the start, we have chosen to make them ambassadors of the projects and also put their expertise in the programme. Now we have a thousand mentors and that's so much networking, access to networks, access to skills in reflection around all that we can do. So I would say afterwards; I am glad that we have included our mentors in our programme as much as possible from the start and enjoy it as much as possible. This takes time and energy and is sometimes difficult because you cannot work with everyone. But if you take all the mentors who are going to open our doors and think about our skills, about the timing, management, at all levels, then we are almost 500. Then comes working on the model itself. From the start, impress the people as much as possible on the mentors, but also partners that it is also their project and that we are building something together. We use the skills they have as much as possible.

What makes your programme different from that of others?

Our expertise in the intercultural aspect as our target groups work with young people from a migrant background. So Dutch people who were born Dutch will participate in the programme. So the specificity of our target groups, the elderly and migrants, if I may call them that. The intercultural and the expertise on the specific bottlenecks of that target group means that we have a certain voice to have a more systemic impact by being able to give a concrete recommendations to the government at the national and European level. But also because we now have so many stories of young people who touch reality, and try to bring that into the spotlight to be able to change that more at the legislative level. So briefly; the specificity of our target group makes us look a bit different from the other mentoring projects.

Does mentoring for people with a non-Western background require a specific approach?

Prepare them, in our case in cultural encounters, in other case mentoring with the disabled or the elderly or whatever. I especially think that the content of the training, which depends on the target groups, can make the difference around the quality and then, of course, all the professionalism of the team and staff. I think the target audience is also going to define this; at what frequency it is necessary; should it be something intensive, should it also be holistic or can it be limited to specific bottlenecks. With us, the choice became clear fairly quickly. it must be holistic guidance because there is a lot involved in terms of housing problems, childcare, and mobility. So it has to be intensive, it has to have a full view of the reality and the environment of the young people. This is unlikely to be the case with highly educated Belgian youth who need a network or certain skills, or more defined bottlenecks. Start from the target groups, make a deep analysis of who they are. So taking the time, in the beginning, to find out who they are is very important. From then on when that happens, I think mentoring can be beneficial to everyone at some point. With us it is very broad on many levels, with others it is going to be deeper and more precise.

What do you offer your mentors?

It will depend on who they are, what their expectations are, but if I look back on what they say afterwards, you can also find that in our annual report. That's a win-win relationship in the end. For one it will be that "I have learned about the reality of the young people, but I now see that it looks a bit different", "I can talk about it, I have gotten a different view of it". That's one and I think it's educational to get out of your comfort zone and take the risk of meeting people who have a whole different reality. From the human experience around intercultural, going to meet someone from Afghanistan every week for 6 months. Promoting new skills is very interesting for them in terms of coaching, leadership, passing on knowledge, drawing up an action plan.

This also has an impact on the company for those who are still active, the over 50s. Especially for them staying active, being appreciated towards friends and family themselves. Ultimately for the over 50s who are still active in companies is attractive for companies from the fact that we are moving more towards multiculturalism in the workplace and it becomes a serious challenge for many companies to find solutions to it. The more companies send over 50s to a duo to coach someone, the more they will build up internal expertise on how to deal with the issue of intercultural work in the workplace. I think that is very important now and will be even more in the future; How should a certain level of expertise be within the company that is also part of the diversity plan, but how do you do that? And I think the best way is to participate in something like this as a duo because they receive training there and after that, they can also experience it in practice with a first duo and a second duo and pass that on within the company. It is a serious challenge for companies to work better around this theme.

Which elements do you prioritize in your mentoring work?

In professionalism and quality. With quality, it is employment rate, percentage of restarts, of broken tandems that must be kept as low as possible and turnover of our starting employees. Why? Because someone who leaves with the relationship of trust he has with the mentors, the mentees, etc. That is always a great loss. We are in a moment in our society where a solution urgently needs to be found, so we want to do as much as possible as soon as possible but not at the expense of quality. With us, that is going to happen faster by distributing and duplicating the programme geographically than trying to duplicate it at a local level and that is why we chose to be in other cities as soon as possible. We can do that in a fast and efficient way because we also have the right CRM systems and experience to do it faster than local people are going to do. We do not intend to have flag wheels all over the world, but we know that this will happen faster and that we will be stronger every time, also in our ad focus activities if it is done through Duo for a Job.

Now I take Rotterdam as an example. There are cultural differences and we have to take them into account and that is why we always work with a local social entrepreneur, in this case, a Rotterdammer or Rotterdam star, who can also adapt the model and adapt it to the local reality. But the structure, the skeleton of the model remains the same.

What is something a mentor or mentee said about a relationship that stuck with you?

At the beginning of the duo, we individually ask the mentees in our first conversation; can you describe your ideal mentor. The first thing they said was; as old as possible. I was a bit shocked by that because that is not something you often hear in Belgium with Belgian people 'as old as possible' and that has remained to me because it is very attractive for the mentees we work with because people work. We have started from what is attractive to young people with a different culture and unfortunately, it is only with us that the elderly are not appreciated and in almost all other cultures it is much more the case. That is still me and what they say in the duo; "So nice that I finally had access to someone else older like me who has experience in distance opposite, who has the time too". Gaining access to certain youth, we feel even younger. So that helps us to still use the social network as well because we have to and stay young.

What are your ambitions for the future of your programme?

In numbers, we have now started up 2800 duos cumulatively in 7 years. I say we can now do 1,000 on an annual basis, but ultimately we want to start 5,000 new duos in the next 3 years where we are already present. So eventually the number of duos will double what we have been able to do in the last years and then increase our volume and capacity on an annual basis. This can happen strongly because the fact that we are going to duplicate on a geographical level means that we very at their level every year, especially in the beginning their ambitions can double. The intention is to be present in a new country every year and to open a new city in a country where we are already present. So expand to ten new cities in the next 4 years. That is our ambition, if that cannot happen so quickly, then that is a shame because it is urgent, but we will do everything we can to make it happen.

What can you tell us about your mentoring programme?

ECHO mentoring programme. ECHO stands for Expertise Centre for young people with a migration background in higher education. The organization has been around for 25 years and it was founded by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Our aim is to improve the educational pathway of Dutch students with a migration background to higher education. Our mentoring programme involves mentors from corporates and it was started 11 years ago.

It is a small organization and the team consists of five employees. The mentoring programme is one of the activities that ECHO does. Each project has a leader. We have different variations of the mentoring programme. There is a mentoring programme where several companies joint, and there is also a programme carried out in-house at companies.

We make an average of 100 matches per year. Companies participating this year include: Google, Liander, Dutch Railway, Achmea insurance. Corporates join our mentoring programme because mentoring is applied in their business to improve their inclusivity and diversity. So they join mentoring to come into contact with young people of immigrant background. The workshops that our programme offers during the match, are about how mentors can give diversity and inclusion a place in their work as a professional.

What does your mentoring process look like?

The process is based on the idea that companies make mentors available. That is an average of 10 to 15 mentors per company and based on the number of companies. By 2020, there are eight companies participating in the mentoring programme, so there are 80 mentors available. That way we recruit that number of mentees each year. Last year's mentees tell their own network that the opportunity is there to apply for a mentor. There are also students who we recruit directly, focusing on students in higher education from any educational course.

How is your programme funded?

The participating companies pay a fee. This fee is for specific services we offer them, and to help them focus on diversity and inclusion. In that regard, mentoring has a moral aspect to it, to improve social justice because you want to help someone to get ahead. Mentors want to give something back to society. The reciprocity of the mentoring programme is that the companies also want to learn from the mentees to become a more multicultural organisation. Mentoring is a way to get in touch with young people of different backgrounds and learn from them to understand what they encounter when applying for a job. And there are things that professionals are not aware of, but that are important; these are the uncomfortable subjects.

It is not easy to talk about exclusion, and over your own prejudices. We offer a safe environment to explore and to reflect in a critical way.

What is the goal of your mentoring programme?

Awareness raising. We provide a vocabulary, a framework, concepts and definitions to understand this subject. Often people are afraid that they will say the wrong things. We offer tips and frames to mentors to lead a conversation in a different way and they can try that out. We offer a concrete language. In this programme we say: name everything and learn from it.

What is your current role within the mentoring programme?

I have been the coordinator of the mentoring programme for many years. We are now in the transition phase of handing this over to new colleagues. I am responsible for communication, the recruitment of the mentees, the matches, and the meetings and the point of contact for mentors and mentees if they need support. I am also responsible for contact with the companies and organizations that make the mentors available.

Why do you think mentoring is important?

What you notice is that many young people from our target group first generation to go to college so they often have to figure things out for themselves. They don't have the network to connect to a company to see how things happen there. These young people see very few immigrant employees in the business world, because it is not that diverse here. They also have to deal with discrimination, as studies show. So they run into structural barriers. Mentoring is a tool to break through these barriers and to be able to make the initial connections. So in that respect, I think it is very important to be able to offer personal contacts and support to young people who are proactive, motivated and driven. Something that can be a very small effort, can make a big difference.

Have you changed things that you thought would have a greater impact?

Something the organization tries to refine every year is expectation management. You notice that everyone joins with a different expectation, especially with such a large programme. It is very important to express explicitly from the start what the purpose of your programme is, but also that there is no one specific way to get there. There are different needs, different learning styles and a very diverse population. Assist your mentees in setting learning objectives and in making agreements concerning communication such as how to keep in touch and how often to meet. These are things that may come naturally to some and more are more challenging to others. What our programme has also made a shift in, is workshops dealing with diversity in your corporate context, instead of mentor-skills. So we offer mentors an experience and expertise they normally do not get to know within their organization. In that respect, the mentoring program has also started to focus much more on how you can understand diversity and inclusion and translate it into your context.

If you could go back in time and you started the programme. And you could give yourself advice, what would this be?

The point of expectations. It just pops up every year. The mentoring programme continues to develop, so every year we ask our stakeholders what to improve. A good example of this is Covid-19. Last year we had to make a switch to online mentoring. What makes mentoring so important is human contact and interaction. This went completely online. We had to find out what this means for the method we use. We reflect critically over and over again. The changed context means that things also have to be changed in our approach.

What makes your programme different from other programmes?

One part that distinguishes us is that we see mentoring as a means to bring about systemic change. For us, mentoring is not only about linking two individuals. Individuals are part of a community. Our network considers diversity and inclusion as important topics and looks for ways to contribute to change. If every mentor puts these goals on corporate agenda's within his or her company, and actively contributes to it as well, the company can also change. We see this as a way to get an organization moving and thus actually bring about social change on a larger scale with the power of individuals who are connected, and then specifically in the topic of inclusion.

An example. We run mentoring activities at a company in the beauty industry. One of the mentors was made aware by her mentee of how the images the company used did not reflect her mentee at all. The mentor immediately made work of this. This is a good example of impact. As a professional, the mentor realized through the questions of the mentee, that they miss a perspective in their branding. And this causes systemic change because those images go around the world.

What do you offer the mentors?

Many mentors move around in their own group of people who are like them. So for mentors, this is a way to get into touch with people with different backgrounds and perceptions. Besides that, mentors form a network of professionals together, and , it is interesting for them to hear how things go at other companies. You notice that people enjoy exchanging experiences. Along the way, they have contact with their mentees and they learn much from each other's experiences. Discussing certain issues with each other and gaining new insights, because other mentors have different ideas or suggestions for this. It's a bit of professional development.

Does mentoring for migrants require a specific approach?

We consider a specific approach very important in the context of diversity. We refer to this as a colour blind and colour conscious approach. A colour blind assumes that you do not see colour because everyone is equal. That way, you deny the diversity that there is. Not only in terms of experience but also in needs. Colour awareness is therefore a specific policy. This often concerns young people with an immigrant background. They choose not to use the word non-Western people, instead of migrant, because they can be born in the Netherlands and thus have not migrated. Being Dutch is often associated with white and not with people of different colours. When you talk about a specific policy, people quickly think that it is about being disadvantaged and lagging behind. The image that arises with a specific policy is not speaking the language or help with the Dutch language. We should pay more attention in policy making to the fact that young people systematically have less opportunities for find jobs, so we have to create extra opportunities. This has nothing to do with a language deficiency. For our target group, disadvantage is created by the circumstances and not because they are not smart or motivated enough.

What elements do you prioritize in the mentoring work?

The human contact, so looking at the individual learning objective and taking that as a starting point to connect people. We create a community as well, so that people realize that they are part of a larger network and community of people who want to learn together, have the same collective goals and in that respect also create social trust.

What is something a mentor or mentee said about a contact that stuck with you?

We have many mentees from different backgrounds. With the refugee crisis, we have also had many mentees with a refugee background. This is a context that the programme does not regularly deal with because we mainly focused on people who were born in the Netherlands and who study in higher education. Many refugees do not have a residence permit yet and we said, if you think you will benefit from our programme, then you are welcome. in. One of the mentees eventually got a job at a large company and told me that many people in the Netherlands only want to help you if you have a residence permit. Only then will you get access to opportunities. Always ask the individual what they want instead of determining in advance that things are not possible, because the rules do not allow it. The rules don't always take reality into account. For us, the people are the starting point and from there we look at how we can change the system instead of taking the system as a starting point and placing the people in it.

What are the ambitions for the future of your programme?

We want to reach more people with a greater chance of systemic change. As a coordinator, I would like create a situation so that the mentors work together within and across organizations. It is now often individuals who stay within their context and apply that image in their own context only. I can see that several in-house mentoring programmes have been established because former mentees now work there. So that former mentees become ambassadors of mentoring as an instrument for inclusion and change. The more flowers bloom, the more beautiful it is.

What can you tell us about your mentoring programme?

Kein Abseits is located in Berlin and we have a mentoring programme in one part of Berlin called Reinickendorf. We extended to another part in the beginning of 2020. Besides mentoring we also have some other projects like youth engagement and open youth activities. The name comes from soccer language. It means you don't stand on the offside, everyone is involved and has a chance to participate. We use that phrase because in the beginning our association used soccer (especially with girls) as one part to get in contact with the kids. We see it has a very important role for children to participate in group activities. We still have two schools where we have soccer teams but it's not our main activity anymore.

Kein Abseits exists since 2011, and since 2012 we have this mentoring programme with schools. From 2014, this programme has gone on a bigger scale as we have mentoring for refugee kids who came to Berlin. We are a team of 14 people, but the mentoring team is 4 people.

On average, we do 70 to 80 matches every year. This means that 50 to 60 new matches. The programme runs for 8 months and then they have the chance to evaluate how it works and how the relationship is going. If they want to go on they change into a new programme, which extends the tandem. So we try also to help these tandems to make a long lasting relationship and support them over a longer time.

How is your programme financed?

We have different resources, on the one hand by the state of Berlin, and also by the districts. Then we have company support, like donations. There are different sources and we don't have to worry about shutting down completely if one of them runs out.

What is your current profession in the mentoring programme?

I'm the leading coordinator. So my role is to organize everything, manage the whole programme, like the basic works of finding the kids and mentors, matching them, supporting them and guiding them. But also to help with the qualification of the mentors to do the evaluations, keep up the quality standards, developing them and networking.

What is the goal of your mentoring programme?

We want to connect people from different backgrounds so they get to know and understand each other, hopefully to make the society a much more peaceful place. On the other hand we want to support the kids to find their talents and potential to gain self confidence, learn something new about themselves and about their possibilities. Of course we want to give our mentors the chance to do something useful, to feel needed, to give something back to the society and to see Berlin through the eyes of a child.

Why do you think mentoring is important?

I speak to mentors and many of them tell me that they already had informal mentors in the past. And that these people helped them to get a different view and open their minds. It is important for kids to have someone in their life who sees their potential and gives them self confidence, besides their parents. In the best case they have really caring parents who would do everything to support their children and even then it's good to have someone else who supports them. Many kids come from really difficult backgrounds, maybe they have several brothers and sisters, parents are always working, they live in a single parent household where there is not much time. I think mentoring is a good way to make the kids feel there is someone taking care of their needs and listening to them. It gives them a positive idea about themselves, and maybe sometimes it's easier to talk to someone who is not your father or mother.

What small changes did you make in your programme that had a big impact on the desired impact?

We started the project with the three pillar system: mentoring, football and job shadowing. In the beginning the three parts came together, the kids who went to soccer eventually were the kids who were able to participate in the mentoring programme. By time we changed that because we found out that there are kids who really want to participate in the group, but maybe they don't want or need the mentoring. So we opened that more, there's still the possibility to do both but they don't need to. In this case we really have kids that want to participate in the programme. Usually we work in cooperation with schools and shelter homes. The social workers or teachers tell us which kids should probably participate. The programme runs well, people know about us and the parents can ask us directly if their kids can participate. This means that the kids who really want to participate can and the parents or families support the programme and the mentor-mentee relationship. We still have the soccer part but they don't have to participate and also we still sometimes show them new jobs. We have girls days and boys days where companies open their doors and show the kids what they do.

If you could go back in time to where you just started as a mentoring practitioner and you could give yourself advice, what would it be?

I think relationships are very important. I know there sometimes are coordinators who have to handle 50 to 60 mentee-mentor relationships at the same time which can be difficult. I would try to keep the relationships with the mentors and the parents because you are in the middle of this. You can hear and feel from their reactions maybe different things than their parents. So you can interact really fast before issues come out. It's people and it's about relationships and as a coordinator you should work on the relationship with all of these people.

Also I think this is the balance, not to go too deep so that you still find your own limit. Find the balance because it's not a usual job, you're in a very deep relationship with all those people. It's about trust in the end. We do like leisure time mentoring, it's not about homework and the kids are very young so it is about trusting each other. The kids need to trust us and the mentors, otherwise the relationship won't work out.

What makes your programme different from other programmes?

From the practical part we have a guided beginning and a guided end, so we start as a group. The tandem knows they are not alone, there are other tandems starting and finishing at the same time. Everybody knows it's a programme and they also have the chance to leave it if they want to. This gives us a huge freedom to find mentors because most of the mentors we have are students or people who just started working and don't have a family yet. They want to start something useful but they don't want to feel this responsibility; they have to do this for the rest of their lives. We give them a chance, we're very transparent. After 8 months they can decide if they want to go on or not. For us it's always amazing to see we created a long term relationship. Also, after that they sign a contract but it's for one year max. After that year we asked them again.

I know from other organisations in Berlin that they are not this structured. Some tandems can get lost on your way because you just lose the overview. You may be good in matching but not in finishing. I think that's really important to realize for all the participants. And during the programme they have group activities, the mentors have meetings and also training. We try to keep them together and call it a family so they know they are part of the programme and interact together.

What do you offer your mentors?

We offer them qualification training. The first training is before the match so everybody has to participate, that's really important. Usually these qualification training sessions are really useful because we try to support them with information about cultural background and intercultural communication, because we have many kids with a foreign background. But culture can mean the difference in social culture and also in how to support the kids and improving and finding talents. There are different kinds of training. We also offer group supervision so they can exchange experiences. Me or one of my colleagues is always there to support them. The mentors can see they gain experience that they can give forward, which is also helpful for their self confidence. It's helpful for all the mentors because they see they're not alone.

Then they can call us personally. Every tandem has it's personal coordinator, which is me or one of my colleagues. So they always have the chance to get in contact with us. And we provide them with some money for activities. Most of them are students and we didn't want them to spend time and money. We tell them the €150 is for 8 months and they should spend it. We provide them with many tips on activities they can do together. We do our own activities too, in summer we go to the forest and the museum. So we try to give them ideas and practical support.

Does mentoring for people with a non-western background need a different approach?

Yes. I remember when I began in 2014 and went to the shelter homes to get to know the kids and the parents. The idea of mentoring is really unknown in non-western countries. Many of these families come from backgrounds where family systems play a huge role and they are now used to a stranger taking care for their kids just because they want to. You need to spend a little bit more time to make them understand what mentoring means and also where the limit is. I think they need a different approach because the idea of mentoring is not so much known. But actually in Germany it was also not really known but the idea of 'Patenschaft' may be more accepted.

So it's important to talk about the expectations and the boundaries?

Exactly, it's not about just homework or just learning the language. Of course the kids will learn the language but not because the mentor sits with him or her and does the homework. They learn the language because they spend time with each other and they explore the city and all in the German language. I think this is something many parents say, they come here to give their kids a better life. Now they have to study and be really really good at school. The parents think the kids need help with school, but that is not the idea of mentoring.

What elements do you prioritize in your mentoring work?

We have a good structure they can follow. Then of course to be open for the people who come there. It's very important to be interested in these people, people who want to be a mentor and the people who want to become a mentee. To be really interested in people's lives and needs. I think it's also a really important element to not plan something around the participants but with them.

What is something a mentor or a mentee said that really stuck to you?

A while ago I got to know a girl from the football group we provide in a cooperating primary school, who was always seeking attention and made it hard to play as a team. Her mentor was really giving the attention but also showing her her boundaries. After the 8 months our program ran, we asked both about their experiences. The mentor answered: ...we also had some difficulties with each other but we solved them together. She listened to what I told her about also taking care of other peoples' feelings and needs. We also talked about the positive developments she made and I encouraged her. She now says the mentor is the most important person after her parents. It was really wonderful because it came from the heart. Last week another mentee told me she has always been shy to get to know new people. But since she's now with her mentor, she found out it's good to talk to people and to be open. Because they made a really good relationship and she's happy she dared to open up for the programme.

I think those are the things you also need to hear, it's one of the important things too. You have to find these stories and experiences. You're doing your work and in the end you don't know your impact but you sometimes have to talk to the people directly and collect this stuff. These things give you the strength to go on.

What are your ambitions for the future of your programme?

Mentoring is used in a larger scale In the US. it's a strong tool but in Germany it's not and I think it should be much more used as a tool to strengthen society and the kids. I have the ambition to make mentoring more popular in Germany. That would be something I would like to work on.

What can you tell us about your mentoring programme?

Mentor UP, UP means the University of Padova/Padua. It has been going on for around 12 years. We are financed by the university. Every year we make questionnaires and we collect data for our research, which we are going to present in the next summit; about interactivity, self-esteem and connectedness. At the same time we study mentors, the quality of relationships and the mentees. We administer the questionnaires in the beginning of a programme, in the middle and the end of a programme.

What is the goal of your mentoring programme?

We work with children, age 8 till 12 years old. Our objective is for them to improve self-esteem or connectedness with school, teachers, neighbors, a family or help people/ children that came from single parents or families at risk. And at the same time we give to university students a chance to do a service learning period. So trying the real world competencies they have or want to improve.

We offer them a place to practice with their skills and the theory that they learned at university. Most students are psychology students. So they are interested in working in the community and to gain experience with schools, teacher, families that are struggling with problems or immigrants. So they can follow a traineeship with us and participate. We also measure the skills, the motivation to volunteer or the connection with problems of society or the connection with different people coming from different ethnicity. At the same time we try to collect data from mentors and the mentees.

Why do you think mentoring is important?

It's important for children to get in touch with somebody that is not so different in age but can be a role model and try to intercept difficulties that do not come out of the school environment or in families. So I think it's a way to prevent problems such as dropping out of school or starting misbehavior.

What small changes did you make that had a big impact on desired impact of your programme?

We are trying to find where we have the most impact. So we study self-esteem or connectedness, starting interactivity or problematic behavior. We try to find different instruments which are connected in a better way with the mentor relationship. But we also have a lot of opinions from schools that are glad to work with us because they see that there are differences in behaviors of a student in the classroom and with mentees.

It is not measurable but it is important to know that schools see difference in children that participate in the programme. It is important for us that we can exchange the different points of view with the teachers, to understand the children's' behavior in the classroom. Because sometimes they know things that the mentors didn't know about mentees. So it is important to have these moments of confrontation.

If you could go back in time and give yourself advice when you just started working with mentoring, what would it be?

I have seen for many years that things are working. It's difficult to capture the results in a scientific way. At the same time I can see from parents, children and teachers that the programmes are working. So I think it is important to carry on.

What makes your programme different from other programmes?

We work with university students and I don't think all the programmes work with this target group, so our students are from 18 to 26. We also working with migrants from communities. We are trying to see if it works with this age, because they are around 17 years old. The mentees are older.

Does mentoring for people with a non-western background need a specific approach?

Yes but we are trying to see which approach works because we do not have so many migrant children. The problems are different and we need mentors that are conscious about this difference. But we have seen that all the relationships went to the end of a programme. And they need a different training. The mentors that work in the community have participated in the training with educators and psychologists from the community. We try to give more instruments for them. And try to make them understand how their mentees live in the community. We must observe them and training is very important. For the mentors it is an occasion to improve their social skills and attitude towards other people. This helps them for their future career or they can see that it is not for them. We offer traineeship for all the students. They have a certificate at the end of the programme with all the hours of mentoring.

What elements do you prioritize in your mentoring work?

Last year the priority was to vocalize mentors and try to improve the self-esteem with the mentees. But with the COVID problems, the priority was to make all the relationships count to the end of the programme. And we did except for two situations. Because different problems they had less time to spend with their mentees. But it was important to stay in touch with the mentees. There were digital connectivity issues. We didn't have a chance to measure or do a lot of questions because the situation was very difficult.

What is something a mentee or mentor said about their relationship that really stuck to you?

We usually have a meeting with the teachers at the end of the programme. And a teacher told us that a mentee was improving their behavior in school and their social skills. Many mentees wanted to carry on with the same mentors. So they had a good experience. They had a friend to talk about things, such as COVID. Or to talk about difficulties in different situations. But we didn't meet with them directly because of the COVID situation.

What are your ambitions for the future of your programme?

I would like to grow the programme with more mentors and mentees. And it is also interesting to understand the approach with migrants. For me personally I would like to understand if it is possible to carry on the digital experience of mentoring. Because we have seen difficulties in this period. Like getting in touch with mentees and digital mentoring.

What can you tell us about your mentoring programme?

The name of our programme is Mentor to work. We were founded in August or September 2017, but in the first months, we were still busy getting started. From January 2018 we were running at full speed, until September 30, 2020, when our programme ended. At the moment we employ six coaches plus one team coach. On average, we had six to seven coaches, who were therefore in direct contact with mentees and mentors. We have an average of 100 matches per year. Our programme is funded through Flanders, so the local government within an entire policy area called the focus on talent, which included several projects, including a mentoring initiative, ours.

What is your current role in your mentoring programme?

I am the program's team coach, so that means I coordinate our team and activities and make sure there is sufficient consultation among people. I make sure that the structure is good and clear and that the coaches can do their work properly. I am also in contact with external organizations, for example, start-up collaborations above a local level with companies / governments, etc.

What is the purpose of your mentoring programme?

We had a few main goals, the first goal was to empower people with a migrant background, looking for work. We did this through mentoring. We have also used mentoring to break through prejudices and that was the second main goal, which was to give diversity an effective place in society and ensure that there is less prejudice, both on the side of the mentees as well as on the side of the mentors. By bringing them into contact with each other and by getting them to know each other differently, we hoped that there would be less prejudice. With this, we also wanted to better connect the talent of job seekers and the labour market. This means reducing the distance between job seekers with a migration background and the labour market.

Why do you think mentoring is important?

I think it is very important because mentees (people with a migration background looking for work) get the opportunity to be strengthened without an authority figure involved. Through mentoring, they can talk to someone about what they are experiencing, what they are trying to do and how they are trying to find work. It is not only about drawing up a motivation letter but also about how I can find my way in a sector that I do not know. For example, I have a difficult job interview where I apparently cannot do anything, including the emotional burden that comes with this. The mentees are allowed to discuss this with someone without a relationship of authority and without their problems putting extra weight on the family / their partner, as their network is often very small and their partner is often the one on whom they place all the burden.

What small changes have you made that had a major impact on the desired impact of your programme?

Maybe I can give an example. I think especially in the field of communication, that we did things that brought us to the next level. Until last June we had not given so much attention to promoting our project. When we approached our communication in a slightly more professional way and we set up a campaign in many ways; such as just traditional search for volunteers, but also strengthening social media and starting things up there. We saw after a few months that the influx (of mentors and mentees) seriously increased. But it takes time to see results, so you start communicating on day 1 and you don't see progress until day 100. I think this is the most important thing we were able to do that got us people's attention.

If you could go back in time and give yourself some advice when you first started working with mentorship, what would it be?

What I still miss in what we've done is bringing the stories of our mentees and mentors more to the front, so called story-telling. By bringing the stories of the people to the front I saw that this made other people enthusiastic and that you can reach more people. It is not about what we do with this project but what our participants' experience. So if I could do this again I would use storytelling from day 1. And see how that could become our core instrument.

What makes your programme different from other programmes?

The fact that we pay as much attention to our mentors as to our mentees. There are several mentoring initiatives in Flanders and I see that job seekers are not always taken into account as much. There is a mentoring initiative and then the idea is; we need to find mentors and train them to be mentors. We also take the mentees into account. In addition to what the mentor can do, we also try to look at training courses for mentees. We want to work for them in a very accessible way. We are aware that looking for work by the mentees is complicated in many different dimensions where people have to compete. For example, I am talking about housing or psychological well-being, integration, language, etc. You cannot see all those things separately. Our coaches always try to take into account the reality of the mentee and to involve organizations where necessary.

Furthermore, I am not sure whether that makes us different, but we also think it is very important to start from the strength of the mentees and not to treat the job seekers like "gosh you are having a hard time" but rather from their talents, involve stories and experiences in the process. As a result, we have also been able to learn a lot from our mentees. The strength of our project I think, we were able to arrive at these insights, in my experience, because we had many different coaches from all parts of the world.

They grew up in another country and people who also had to find their way in Flanders to integrate. So they experienced a bit of what mentees go through. Meetings were frequently scheduled to adapt our work to make our work the best service for our mentees, and this is mainly due to the diverse team.

What do you offer your mentors?

We initially offered a 4-language training in different themes, starting with how a mentoring process works, but also how they can best act towards a mentee, what do you do and what not. Next to this, coaching skills as with the conversations they are going to have they must be able to develop those skills. They also learn things about the trajectory of which a newcomer has to do as people are not always aware of these. And also training on matters of which they are not aware, but that do play a role in language use and so on. So several courses, they also have a coach who is available for questions and we also come up with intervention moments where mentors tell each other what they are doing and thus can obtain advice from each other. We also have networking moments for mentors as well as for mentees and mentors. This is for mentors who also want to increase their network.

Does mentoring for people with a non-Western background require a specific approach?

I think it is very important to take into account the language, we have to take into account that people with a migration background are not overdue, let's get this clear. The use of simple language that enables full communication also seems very important to me. Taking into account the experience of people with a migration background is also important. We have always wanted to bring forward a positive story, but we cannot deny that there is still racism and discrimination in Flanders. It is important to be able to acknowledge this to our mentees, so that also requires a different approach. So just being able to speak openly about what mentees experience, i.e. about discrimination, racism or suspicion of other target groups. I also think it is important to take the preconditions into account, you will also experience this when working with young people, that it is not only about the objectives that you aim for, but also about what they all experience. For people with a migration background, this is sometimes very intense and it is not that they are unable to look for or find a job, it is simply difficult in certain circumstances to function as someone else. Cultural differences are also very important to take into account, for example, we get someone as a mentee, a woman, who is looking for a job, with a different background and education than that of a Westerner. For us people are equal, but sometimes we are asked to only be matched with a man or woman, then I could say we do not take this into account, but in practice, we know that we make the way more difficult for ourselves not to take it into account. We have to listen to the cultural differences and take them into account.

We have to listen to the cultural differences and take them into account.

We do something like this because the mentee must decide his/her way, we cannot decide for the mentee. We try to listen to their question without judgment and from their reality we try to mean something to them. Mentor to work is a project of the minorities' forum, which has been building expertise for 18 years by working with people with a migration background. And try to make a difference to put racism and discrimination behind us.

What elements do you prioritize in your mentoring work?

I also just mentioned the fact that the mentee decides on his autonomy, his way of life. The equality between all partners, the mentors have as much to learn from our mentees and vice versa. So mentee as the owner of his own life, equality and admiration for each other's stories, is central to me. And then communicate from the powers of the mentees and try to open doors for them without a paternalistic view, because it is thanks to their results that other doors can open again.

What is something a mentee or mentor said about their relationship that stuck to you?

What stuck with me is how many times I heard from mentors that it was such a revelation for them, they had no idea about what having a migration background could mean, about the strengths of other people and very often mentors have been able to build a friendship or at least a correct relationship with people with a migration background. To be able to listen with great admiration and realize that there is a huge potential behind our mentees.

What are your ambitions for the future of your programme?

In socio-cultural work, there are certain roles that organizations try to fulfil and one of these roles we call the LABO role in Flanders; the LABO role is experimenting with a certain concept to inspire others to build it up further. For me, Mentor to Work is an example of what you can do in a LABO role. We have experimented with mentoring for 3 years, with what all this can mean for people, we now see the possibility for many organizations in Flanders to start with this. At the beginning of this year, the employment service/agency that can and must guide all job seekers started making resources available to apply to mentoring everywhere in Flanders. In recent months we have had conversations with organizations that are starting to use this to share all our methodology, expertise and experiences with them.

Our objective is to share our methodology, expertise and experiences with other organizations and Mentor to Work will continue to exist in this. The soul of Mentor to Work must continue to exist in the form of other projects they will start with and we are now working on this.

What can you tell us about your mentoring programme?

Our programme is called mentoring at work. We will mainly work on strengthening that professional identity, expanding the network and improving the Dutch language.

What is your goal with a mentoring programme?

R: Our goal is threefold; to strengthen the person's personal resilience, work on the professional identity is therefore effective as well, especially knowing about the experiences from the home country. But also the strengthening of the Dutch language. We work from Limburg whose employers are still much focused on good command of the Dutch language.

What is your current task within your mentoring programme?

I am a mentor coach and coordinator of the project and I work together with two other mentor coaches. I attract myself from an organizational point of view to everything. I am also the contact person between "VDAB". But actually operationally we do the full coordination of recruitment with 3 mentor coaches, so the recruitment of both mentee's and mentors and the matching between the mentee's and mentors.

Also that as a coordinator you are a kind of bridge and can point out opportunities to the mentors.

Of course. You do not have depth with the mentee's as the mentor has and that is completely okay, it is the one-on-one relationship between the mentor and mentee that is the most important. We also work on creating a community among the mentee's and the mentors together. So when we make a good connection with a company somewhere, we try to look at it in its entirety and to introduce the people who all fit there within that company. We organize speed dates at larger companies, but sometimes there are also small and medium-sized companies. In the end, many companies are open to foreign talent. But wage costs in Belgium are extremely high, and this will probably also be the case in the Netherlands. So companies are still quite picky when it comes to recruitment and the corona crisis adds more to that. In addition, we were already so far that we actually received weekly phone calls or emails from companies in which they literally asked for new candidates to fill in vacancies within the companies.

Why do you think mentoring is important?

I have worked professionally in the recruitment sector for more than 10 years as a temp consultant and a job coach. You have a certain professional training, a certain professional background and that is an absolute added value for an individual.

But you are bound to time, to the project and to the employer/client as the relationships are built in a professional setting. But with a mentor who is a volunteer wants to build a relationship with someone in their personal time, to lift another person and to bring out the best in that other person, then it is a completely different way which is more personal. You get a completely different dynamic with a different relationship. And there are certain topics and issues that can be discussed there that may be difficult in a different professional context.

What major and / or minor changes have you made that had major change or desired impact on your programme?

In the beginning we did one-one matching of the mentor and mentees based on certain criteria without them being aware of each other. Later we discovered using speed date events to bring together groups of mentees and mentors while utilizing several criteria's for making the selections. These had two aims; firstly it allowed the foreign mentees get a deeper insight about themselves; where they come from, where they are and how the mentors can support them. Secondly, the mentors were able to share their own personal stories and professional backgrounds while getting to know mentees with different backgrounds, their stories and decide who they would like to help after making connections with the mentees. At the end of the speed date, both the mentees and the mentors chose 3 candidates and then mentor coaches will actually make the matching based on their choices. Though this was not always a guaranteed match, and there were some bad matches which were individually dealt with later. But in general, this method allowed mentors and mentees get an overview of each other and choose the matches based on who they click with or based on their personal and professional profiles. This way the relationship that starts very nicely because someone consciously chooses for each other. With those speed dates we form 100 duos per year and generally, we have a new matching approximately every 6 to 8 weeks.

Additionally, we do a monthly training for both the mentee's and the mentors separately. Mentors are always welcome for the 'training' of the mentee's and who inform about topics of those training. We also work there specialized organizations experienced with issues of society and diversity, dealing with foreign languages, etc. experts in the field. The mentors receive training on certain themes and they also have the opportunity to do interventions amongst themselves; to exchange ideas and share practices and learn from each other. As for the mentees, we offer them the same along with introducing them to the labor market such as learning Dutch and other personal development. However this is a no-obligation programme since many of the mentees have temporary jobs to be financially stable or have families and children to take care of. We make sure that even if they cannot make it to one of the training sessions, we provide them with some of the information so that the mentors and mentees do not miss out on it.

If you could go back in time and just started as a mentoring professional, what advice would you give yourself?

What advice would I give myself then? Wow, that's a deep question. What advice would I give myself is to watch and learn because something you think is good today may not be there tomorrow. After all, you work with people. Sometimes you get used to it but this might change at any moment, like someone who consciously chooses to leave his country and start over somewhere else. So in essence you have to start over and ask yourself where it deviated from the plan. So take the time to get to know people well and work with very concrete tangible objectives. Look and learn. I think this is how I have always done the job and I would not do it any other way. If it works, it works.

Also, people need something to live up to and only work for a year on those. I know a lot of people in these programs who have worked hard on those soft skills and that is good. And someone has to feel good to be able to take action, but sometimes people also have to take action. And by doing those things anyway, you also see other things that might turn out to be very important. But I speak these from my personality as I am very action-oriented. There might be others who see it differently. In the end, the more action that happens, the more concrete things can get.

What makes your programme different from other programmes?

In Belgium there are a number of programmes, but they work with very specific target groups. We work with almost everyone; non-native speakers and non-native speakers with a migration background. But we do not have age categories, or requirements for education level. Thought in the past we only worked with highly educated non-native speakers, but since August we have been working with the entire target group non-native speakers with a migration background. So we also have no regulations in the sense that someone must be a certain age or background. However we do work with a number of parameters.

How do you find your mentors?

We use flyers during parties, we are on social media where we share things and we have recently transformed our website. Furthermore, we are utilizing our network through digital channels such as social media, internet and websites. Sometimes we get in the newspaper. Other times we are going to employers' events. We try to propagate who we are and what we do all the time to make people enthusiastic. Also while looking for volunteers, they really have to be able to do it with their heart and soul. This means that the mentors should be able to understand someone else.

And does mentoring for migrants require a specific approach?

One must indeed be aware of these cultural differences when dealing with migrants. You really have to stand up for different habits, different visions and other opinions, but with an attitude that you are curious about why someone acts differently, or doing it that way. When interacting with young people you have to end up in that world. The target group you as a person have the most affinity with works the best. So you have to be a bit open-minded to the other people in the world to be able to participate in these (mentor) programmes.

Which elements are prioritized in your mentoring work?

Building the relationship, both for us with the participants: the mentors and mentees. And the matching is crucial but also the follow-up. Like with farming: we are going to plant, but above all we are going to ensure that those plants grow nicely. That people feel behaved and that people feel supported and that you can work together towards a goal. That they feel they are part of something valuable. And we have also learned that over the years because in the beginning the focus was very much on recruiting and matching. And then everyone was left to their own devices. In that sense, we were there on the sidelines, but there was much less time for that due to organizational reasons. In the meantime we have made a very nice programme with training and good follow-up and we are now also going to work, we are also going to continue to play out the digital card. We are also going to work with a programme, a digital tool that can actually do the monitoring between mentor and mentee. So effectively what they do together, how often do they see each other and what happens next? We can provide a lot of information via that platform that they can use in their individual moments.

Is there anything a mentor or mentee has said that stuck with you?

Yes, they are always the obvious (self-explanatory) things. Certainly, people who have been in the system for a certain time as migrants or as non-native speakers often feel as if they are just a number. That they come to us and say: "Thank you, I feel like a human again." That is very nice. And recently, a few months ago, there was also a mentee who said to his mentor, "Thank you!, you are my medicine for depression." And yes, that is nice to hear that someone through individual attention, by being heard and that people are interested in who you are and where you come from that can give back strength. Mentees say that too: "My mentor believes in me." And okay that might be very obvious (self-explanatory) to that mentor, "That's why I do it, isn't it?" but people themselves say it makes a big difference. Really feeling that someone believed in you gives so much strength to work towards something. And maybe other people have also tried, but it did not reach them. That their mentor really does things for them spontaneously that they themselves had not expected.

What can you tell us about your mentoring programme?

Our programme is just 'mentoring' because it's a really small programme within our organisation. We mainly do tutoring for children at school and after-school activities. We also have programmes for adults. It started in February 2018. We work with two people, working part-time. So all together it's not even one full job. We make approximately 20 matches every year because we are really small. We are funded from different sources, like European operational programmes who fund us for two or three years.

What is the goal of your mentoring programme?

We are oriented on socially disadvantaged families or families at risk of social exclusion. There is no one set of goals, but to give opportunities to learn more about the world. It doesn't have to be only about careers, but just to go out and see things for children. They are mostly at home or dealing with difficult situations at home. It's only for children and young people from 12 to 26.

Why do you think mentoring is important?

For our circumstances, we work with socially disadvantaged kids and youngsters. In this case, I think mentoring is important because they are not only economically disadvantaged but also socially disadvantaged as they don't know many people outside their family. I see a big benefit for them meeting people and enhancing their social capital.

Are there any small changes that you made since you started that had a big impact on your programme?

I think I have to say we have become less goal-oriented. When we started we wanted each match to have an exact goal which they can fulfill in a short period or a year. First, we had to lower our image of what the goal should be. It doesn't have to be something like get to a new school or find a new school. In some cases, it can be a small goal, like prepare for a school presentation because they are really shy. So this is one of the things, and the second thing is there are still some matches that don't have goals set up like that. So we are working with the mentees about naming what they do. They do a lot of things but it's hard for them to say what the goal is.

What did you learn while starting as a mentoring professional?

We learnt that it is hard to explain to young people in advance what the mentoring programme is or what our vision of mentoring and goals are. So I think we need to communicate it with them in a user-friendly way, and also be with them at their own pace. I think that's very important and it can be meaningful for them.

It can also be hard for the other services to understand what we do. Because we are trying to reach our potential mentees through schools or childcare services. In our country mentoring is not that strongly embedded in our system. What they know about tutoring or after-school activities is a grey area. And we have to be good at explaining to them what we do because they are explaining it to the young people we are trying to reach.

And still, I think we are really surprised that even with those obstacles we have a lot of young people who are interested in it. Even if it requires quite a lot of motivation and obligations from them. So I think we found out it's needed in our context so I'm really happy about that.

And who are your mentors?

They are mainly young people in their late 20's and 30's. We thought that it would be mainly students but I think we have more people who finished school. They are volunteers, 25 young people work with us. But we also have a lot of students as we are based in Prague, where there are a lot of universities and big corporates.

Quite unexpected for me is that we have a lot of people from big businesses which is interesting because our mentoring is not career-based. So first I have to explain to them that this is a new context. They have to lower their goal-oriented expectations, but they are great for this.

How do you think young working people make the time to be mentors?

I think for our case they are able to because we are focused on socially excluded young people and we are a well known organisation. We also do things with adults around finances and stuff. And then I think the volunteers say in the first interview they want to do something back because they often feel fortunate. I think that's why there are a lot of white, well-educated mentors. Rich people who have good jobs feel the need to give back. Sometimes they don't know what it will look like because they expect other things. Poverty can look like many things, sometimes they are surprised. But they are courageous and make it work. Only a few drop out of the programme.

How does learning about poverty give them perspective?

We have to explain these to them well before we introduce them into the family. We have two days or two evenings training for them and we are trying to come up with case studies and try to teach them about the different young people who can be part of the programme. It's not one general story, sometimes it's a single mother with children and sometimes it's a really big family or sometimes it's an ordinary-looking family but they have deeper problems. In some cases, the children have a psychiatric diagnosis. Sometimes the mentors are surprised at the start and we ask them if this is something they want to do. We encourage them after the training to say if they want to do it or not. 20% of the people in the training may decide it's not for them.

What makes your programme different from others?

In our case, it's the people we work with, the socially excluded. I know that some mentoring programmes have different target groups. Also, I think we are quite strong because the mentoring programme is quite small and we can focus on the matches. We only have two workers so we can share the information easily and discuss a lot. We still think of ourselves as a pilot programme that will grow.

But I also think it's good that the organisation we work in is really big, and people know us for the other work. Sometimes our colleagues can work with other family members. I don't say it's always the best thing to come up with more solutions for one family, there is no one type of general good answer. But if there is something bigger we can consult and help find other options that can help them.

What do you offer your mentors?

We offer them support, once every two months we have supervised meetings where they can share what's happening and exchange tips and feedback. And then we have one officer who is only focused on working with volunteers. So it's not only our mentoring volunteers but also others and she can provide them with different types of training if there are enough people interested. And we have some books and materials on the topic of mentoring. On the other hand, we have a big yearly celebration at the end of the school year which is more casual. But we are trying to build a small community of volunteers that share with and motivate each other.

Do you have a community?

Yes, and it's quite common that they stick with us for a long time and they are trying to volunteer for other programmes that we have or they are helping us raise money or awareness. It works quite like a community, not for everyone but the core volunteers. We have more than 130 volunteers in total so that's a big community.

Are you trying to say that everyone requires an individual approach and attention?

Yes, but I mean in mentoring that's what you have to do. It's one on one and they are meeting every week for two or three hours so that's some personal space.

At least in the beginning we try to insist they meet every week. Because in our case the kids are very shy in the beginning and they usually know only their parents or grandparents and they are not used to contact. It takes time to open up and for them to trust the second person. For this reason, we want them to meet every week, but when they know each other they can start meeting less if they agree.

What is the most important in your mentoring programme?

It's important for us to have the possibility to do it individually. For the mentee, it's really important that we can give them the time and space and the right person they can trust. I think in our target group this is important because sometimes it's the first time that they experience something like that. But I would see as a priority also the support for the volunteers. I feel that in some cases the topics are heavy or tough and the volunteer is the one who is in very close contact. At least in the beginning they need our support the most. Or I want to give it to them as a gesture, even if they don't need it. For them to see that we are here as the experts and they don't need to be experts on social exclusion or bad moods.

Is there something a mentor or mentee said to you about their relationship that stuck to you?

I do have one tandem' and I like that they both said that they are at the point where they are learning from each other. The mentee was happy that the mentor trusted him enough to take him to skate parks and show the mentor how to skateboard. Even though the mentor was an older and stricter man who works at a bank. They trust each other strongly as they would never do this at the beginning of their relationship.

What are the ambitions for the future of your programme?

I would at least try to maintain the quality. For me, the question of quality and sustainability is still a lot about how to care about the volunteers. I was thinking about maybe doing some training. We updated the training for mentors last year. I would also like for the mentors to have more possibilities to see other experts. Not only for training but also to create a bigger network and possibilities to consult one on one with other experts.

What can you tell us about your mentoring programme?

It is called Punt de Referencia. We have three different mentoring projects. I think the reference is the first one we've had on the session. It was the first project that the organisation had. And it was the first mentoring project in Spain, it was lunch 23 years ago. It is a project aimed at vulnerable young, mainly young that were in foster care. When they leave the care centres at the age of 18, we start to accompany them. And we start two years before at the age of 16. So the reference is a project with the volunteers who provide emotional support, leisure and linguistic support, accompany them, to the corporation insertion, studies, and researchers closing all the things that they may need to emancipate after they leave the care centres. And so we provide them with the support of nine months as mentoring. We have two practitioners in reference. And then we have the pedagogical coordinator. That is the one supervising all the intervention. The reference had around 80 matches a year.

And how are these programmes funded?

Funds from public and private donors. So I'd say 60% of the funds are public. And then 30% private such as private companies and so on. And then 10% from donors that are our board. Then some like the work we are doing and make regular donations to support our activities.

What is your current task in the mentoring programme?

We work both with young and volunteers. So I accompany young, through what they need; they need to find a house, they need to find studies and with emotional support. We see the young every three weeks. But we want to accompany them through their needs as well. And they are vulnerable groups with some needs that have to be covered by volunteers. We know how the system works. So we work with the young to cover the professional aspects of their lives. And then we let the volunteers work and accompany them with their experience. We work closely with volunteers and mentees. And of course, in those meetings, as well, we work with them on how to build the relationships and how they are with the mentors and so on.

Why do you think mentoring is important?

Mentoring is essential for our target group because they don't have a lot of macro mentors. They've been in Barcelona for a few months or a few years and didn't have the chance to meet a natural mentoring. Or if they are in foster care, they don't have their own close family or positive mentors around. So I think it is essential when you are young, and you are becoming an adult, to help other people to support you.

So what changes that you made to the programme that had a big impact on the desired impact of the programme?

Yeah, focusing on the reference it would be the duration of the tandem. It used to be six months, and now we extend it to nine months. And the impact is greater with a longer company and relationship. We are trying to focus on having long term accompanies to the young. Another thing was improving and focusing on closing the mentoring relationship. For the last three years, we've been working intensively on the methodology of the closing. So now we do more sessions to close the relationship between the young and the mentor. And with a moderator, we give them some photos. They get the moment to think about the good times they've had during the relationship. This is like a ritual where we take one hour, we give them some photos of themselves together that they've sent us before, we ask them to write some nice message to each other. And I think this is something that has a good impact on the relation and becoming friendships in the future.

If you could go back in time and give yourself advice for when you just started working with mentoring, what would it be?

That it takes time to learn the methodology. Because in the beginning, when you start, it seems it's pretty easy, but it isn't as easy as you think. Once you've seen different cases and different situations going on, something to repeat each year. Over the years, you learn more tools and more abilities to cope with them. Once you want to support the mentees and mentors, make them feel safe and that someone is there in case something happens. It's super important to be there. Even if they don't ask for help, to call them and check on them if they are good, if they need anything or if they want to share something. And it is also important to acknowledge the mentors and the good work they are doing.

So what makes your programme different from other programmes?

One of the things we are focused on is that we work with the youngsters as well as the mentees deeply. So it's not that we just introduce the mentors but we accompany them as well. And we work as social worker with them and get to know them better. And this helps us to make the mentoring relationship better. When we know them, the mentees are far easier to accompany, to build trust, and the relationship. But this is one of the things that makes our project different. And then there is not (as far as I know) a lot of projects in Spain that combines one to one mentoring with group activities, or these group mentoring projects. So I think that with those projects, we made an innovation here.

What do you offer your mentors?

With the mentor, I think we work quite closely and aware of what they are saying. The selection process can be quite long and we ask them to join group meetings. We plan what we do, and we ask them to commit and then we do an individual selection interview. And if we assess they are going to be good mentors, we ask them to come for training. This is the point where we can see their commitment to being a mentor. And then when the training finishes, we match with the young. They send us weekly reports of what they've been doing with the young. And then we offer them group sessions with a volunteer so we can monitor it and see how they are and to share it with others monthly.

And does mentoring for people with a non-Western background need a different approach?

I mean, I think it does change a lot depending on their story because, in the end, we work with young that has a non-Western background that has been here for longer than someone that had just arrived. I think their needs are different. And the mentors can help them to know the context, get to know the city and get to know how things work here. And for the mentors, need to be aware there are cultural background differences. And I think this is one of the things that motivated more mentors so they can get to know different backgrounds and different ways of seeing the world. But again, with the relationship that can have some impact.

What are the elements that are the most important in your mentoring work as a coordinator?

We prioritize the mentees. We are the ones who are there, we're there to help them and we're there to accompany them. So we prioritize making them feel comfortable. I think that a good example is with Co-Vid restrictions, we are doing everything online unless its a meeting with mentees. We see them say face to face as it benefits them more. But for example training with mentors, we do it online.

What are your ambitions for the future of your programme?

Well, I think at the moment, we want to continue with our work as we have already consolidated. And our ambitions lie more in the methodology. We want to accompany more and have more women working in it. We have a lot of males and we will have more female in our collective as immigrants. So women as the non-accompanied migrants and non-accompanied young migrants. So we'd like to reach them and to have more of them participating in our project. And things we can now focus on is to have other spaces where the mentees can participate in the development of the project.

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