

Finland: Support Services for Youth (Ohjaamo)

Type of provider

Ohjaamo (cabin, control room, here: place of guidance) provides support services for youth under the age of 30. There are different service points in the capital area, but also in other Finnish cities. Focus on education, employment and everyday life.

Objectives

Low-threshold services. Particularly for youth outside education or employment. Clients from immigrant backgrounds. Support, guidance, counselling, finding a place to study, work or an apprenticeship.

Assessment approaches

One-to-one interview, counselling, information. On-going meetings to build trust. Working together on CV and practicing job interviews.

Target Group

Youth under 30, especially those outside education and employment. Immigrant youth includes refugees and second-generation immigrants. Some clients lack basic education certificates, or wish to transfer directly into working life after graduation, instead of studying further.

Potential transferability/ scalability

Individualised services are effective. Clear need for services for youth, especially immigrant youth. This concept has a legislative base in Finland. Needs financing and local support.

Summaries or Basic elements of analysis

Support services for youth. Special group: youth from an immigrant background. One-to-one counselling and practicing job search skills. Idea is to find the youth a place to study or work. Support services cooperate closely with companies and are able to recommend clients for job interviews.

Introduction in keywords

- Support Services for Youth (Ohjaamo)
- Finland
- guidance, counselling, support, providing information and opportunities
- youth under 30, especially those outside employment and education
- also for refugees, immigrants, second-generation immigrants
- starting point: interests, motivation and abilities of the youth
- working together on CV or preparing for job interviews

Organisation and Description of the tool(s) (which skills are assessed)

Ohjaamo (cabin, control room, here: place of guidance) provides nationwide low-threshold services for youth, particularly those outside employment and education. Immigrant youth form a group within this group, facing their own challenges. The focus is on finding education or employment and managing everyday life. Yet the service operates less by assessing certain skills in a very specific way than by starting from the youth as a person: their interests, motivation and abilities.

Building trust takes time. Often a few meetings or a longer period goes by before the youth opens up or is able to identify their problems – for instance, the lack of a basic education certificate. Thus, a part of the work is reaching out to youth and providing people with information that the service exists and is available if they need to talk.

Implementation (how the tool is used, how the assessors are trained, how often it is used)

The service offers one-to-one guidance and support, starting from the youth's background. Getting to know an immigrant youth includes asking where they are from, how long they have lived in Finland, what they have worked with and about their educational background. If they lack an education, or have a limited work history, the Ohjaamo employee enquires about their interests and suggests options. The idea is to find the youth a job, place to study or an apprenticeship, based on their motivation, abilities and interests.

Although a core part of the work is individual counselling, employees also work in teams. Moreover, Ohjaamo organises workshops and events for youth, working on CVs or meeting recruiters. Employees may help their clients practice interviewing or fill in forms, which are challenging particularly for people who are not fluent in Finnish. Ohjaamo also supports youth in gaining certificates that they need in certain industries, such as the hygiene passport for people working with food.

Employees sometimes have a very personal, concrete understanding of the challenges youth face. Our interviewee arrived in Finland as an asylum seeker. Since then, he has studied and worked in different fields – from translating and interpreting to working with youth – also working abroad in various countries. He functions as a mentor for immigrant youth. It helps not only having a language or country in common, but also sharing some of the same experiences. Of course, he is able to direct clients to opportunities he himself did not necessarily have in the 1990s.

There are Ohjaamo units at different locations: from Helsinki – in the south – to Rovaniemi, in Northern Finland. Ohjaamo units can also be combined with other services. For example, the Espoo Ohjaamo is moving into a building with different youth services.

Since it was established in 2014-2015, Ohjaamo has reached out to parents and organisations. Team members also approach youth in for example shopping centres. Although they have succeeded in making the service more known, there is still a need for more effective communications and marketing. When asked, only half of immigrant youth may answer that they are familiar with the service.

Description of the target groups

Ohjaamo provides support services for youth under 30, particularly those outside education and employment. Employees working with immigrants meet clients from newly arrived refugees to people from an immigrant background.

Second-generation immigrants often only need a push in the right direction, because they are already familiar with the Finnish society and the language. Refugees face a number of challenges: arriving in a new, cold and dark country with a strange language from a very different climate, affected by armed conflicts, having spent years outside education, on their way to some destination. It is difficult to assess clients who suffer from traumas. Having arrived as an unaccompanied asylum seeker and being on the cusp of adulthood without the support of one's family is also a particular challenge.

Most immigrant clients are 20- to 25-year-olds. Ohjaamo also sees more male than female clients; immigrant women are more easily employed, the interviewee tells us. He prefers to work with the clients who face the biggest challenges, and because of his own background and education, he is especially suited for the job.

Policy context

According to recent Finnish legislation, unemployed youth under the age 25 have certain obligations to educate themselves further. That is, they may not qualify for unemployment benefits, unless they have completed a (vocational) degree or applied to at least two such programs after comprehensive school (compulsory) or upper secondary education (voluntary).

The Ohjaamo concept stems from this legislation; the idea is to provide low-threshold services particularly for youth outside education and employment. The various regional units receive support and financing from various actors, including municipalities, ministries and the European Social Fund. Ohjaamo ties in with a number of projects that started in 2015.

Ohjaamo cooperates closely with companies. A company searching for new employees may contact the support service, which preselects a number of suitable candidates, which the company then interviews, hiring the best fits. Both sides benefit: recruitment is easier and less time-consuming for the companies, while the clients find employment.

Impact for assessees

The interviewee stresses that the key to making it is learning the language and finding a vocation. There are also an increasing number of opportunities, such as apprenticeship training.

Nevertheless, internal motivation is the strongest force driving clients onwards. Clients pressured by their concerned parents may drop in and out of the support services or education, employment or an apprenticeship during months and years. Other clients, who have set goals for themselves, such as gaining their basic education certificate, or express a genuine interest in working in a certain field, are more likely to succeed – in the same amount of time.

The interviewee admits getting companies on board was “extremely challenging” in the beginning. However, trust builds over time. These days, the cooperation works well for everyone involved.

<http://ohjaamot.fi/etusivu>

