

Young helper program

Introduction: The “Young helper program” offers both individual and group support to primary school pupils. Individual support is provided by a **mentor**, a person who meets one student at a time over a certain period. The mentor helps with school tasks and does free time activities with the child. Next to the individual meetings there are group activities, which are called community programs: common games, visits to cultural institutions and other exciting places in the city or area. These events will be set up by the **program organisers**. High school students who apply to our program can decide which role they prefer: that of a mentor who offers individual help, or they would rather work with the pupils in groups as a program organiser. Individual preferences will be taken into account, however, they must know that the coordinator of the program has the right to decide which role she wants to offer to the applicant. This will be decided after the training which all applicants have to attend. The aim is to see whether the role of a mentor fits to the character of the applicant, whether he/she is mature and ready enough for it. If the coordinator thinks that somebody is not, that person will get the offer to be a program organiser. ***It is important though to communicate the two various roles in a way that noone gets the impression that being a program organiser is not as valuable as being a mentor!***

Groups:

1. Mentees: children with learning difficulties, children with a disadvantaged background, children with little or lack of social network; Age: 10-12 years; Gender: mixed
2. Mentors: high school students, Age: 14-17 years; Gender: mixed.
3. Program organisers: high school students, Age: 14-17 years; Gender: mixed.

Mentors and program organisers attend the same training which is obligatory for all applicants.

Duration: Minimum of 10 weeks (preferably longer, ideally through a whole school term)

General rules of mentoring: One meeting per week, lasting for at least one hour

Place of the meetings: the community room of the primary school

Logistics: if the students/pupils cannot make it for the meeting they should tell the coordinators in advance

Objectives:

For mentees: To provide extra attention and care to those feeling left behind and/or experience little success at school/have a low self esteem

For mentors: To offer assistance to those who have difficulties in creating social bonds amongst their classmates/are marginalized/have problems at school; to practice solidarity through this; to offer a role model for the mentees

For program organisers: To take an active role in the building of the community; to practice facilitating, event organizing, public speaking

Pupils for whom this program was introduced will also develop their **learn to learn competence** just as their **social and civic competence** and **cultural awareness competence**. Their **learn to learn** competence will develop thanks to the advices, techniques and practices they might obtain from their mentors who are their experienced and successful companions since they are already at high school. Facing difficulties in their everyday life, the pupils can see mentoring as an example of being humane towards each other which can shape their own understanding of the interpersonal relations within our diverse society. This can contribute to their **social and civic competences** while being appreciated and respected can add to their self-esteem, strengthen their identity and make them more aware of their own cultural heritage (**cultural awareness competence**).

Planning phase

1. **Step:** Finding those primary schools and high schools which might be interested in the program /Tips: contacting local schools for motivated teachers, signing up for newsletters related to education, visiting conferences dealing with the topic of primary and secondary education/
2. **Step:** Meeting with the headmaster/colleagues of the **primary school** where the mentees come from to introduce the program, set up the frames, deadlines and responsibilities (who is in charge of which step)
3. **Step:** Meeting with the headmaster/colleagues of the **high school** where the mentors come from (see above).
4. **Step:** Meeting with the colleagues of the primary school and discuss the possible candidates, where the school provides a short written info about each candidate in order to find the right mentor for them

Implementation phase

5. **Step: Meeting with the children (future mentees) and promoting the program for them** in a playful and interactive way. It is important not to create the feeling in the children that they lack something or that they are stigmatised as disadvantaged. A special emphasis can be put here on the benefits of having a mentor by highlighting the positive outcomes it might bring to their school results/motivation to learn.

Structure of the meeting:

1. Introducing the program and getting to know the children.

Game#1: We sit a circle, one person stands in the middle. This person has to say one sentence which is true about her/him and which might be also true about others. Example: "Run if you have more than one sibling." All those who can identify themselves with this statement stand up and search for a free chair. Since there is one chair less than the actual participants of the game, there is always one person without a chair, standing in the middle, saying a sentence.

2. Rules of the mentoring.

Game#2: The room is divided into two halves. The facilitator stands in the middle. She reads out statements in connection with the program. Children who think this statement is true, have to go to the right side of the room. Those who think it's false have to take the left part. After each statement they have to decide and take a position. The facilitator then asks them about their opinion – one student from the TRUE group and one from the FALSE part. After their opinion the facilitator explains the rule and the reason why it is set up in this way. Statements are:

- a. It is the mentor's task to keep the time of our weekly meeting in mind. (not true; it is the task of both the mentor and the mentee to keep it in mind)
- b. My mentor is such a nice person, I'm sure he/she is happy to help my friend too. (not true; one mentor is assigned to one mentee only)
- c. I know immediately whom I like and whom I don't. If I don't like someone there is no way that I will spend time with that person. (we hope it's not true for them; since it is the coordinator who will set up the pairs, so we ask the mentees to give a chance to their mentor even if it's not the person whom they like the most from the group)
- d. I think the mentor is a person who always helps at all circumstances. (not true; his/her help should only focus on the studies since this is a school program; also he/she will not write the homework instead of the mentee)
- e. I would be so happy if the mentor could show me all the great places in the city. (not true; the mentor cannot do that since the meetings will be in the school; but we will do our best to organize exciting community programs outside of the school).

3. Qualities of the mentor.

Game#3 the children should collect all qualities a mentor should have, both positive and negative. The facilitator collects each of these on a separate post it. After children ran out of qualities the facilitator shows the image of a balloon and explains that a balloon works on the basis of hot air: this is what lifts it up. At the same time, all the weight is kept in the basket part, we have to get rid of these in order to be able to fly away. The facilitator asks the children to come out and read out the qualities one by one. The children should decide whether the given quality is something that we want to keep or we want to get rid of. They stick the post it accordingly and at the end there is a balloon with all qualities the children want and don't want. The facilitator tells the children that of course there is no perfect person, so let's hope that their mentor will possess some of these qualities and will do his best to overcome the not so good ones.

4. **Next steps:** children should decide whether they want a mentor and should discuss it with their parents. They should let their headmaster know. Then we set up the first meeting between the mentors and mentees and again repeat the rules so it's clear for them.
6. **Step: Introducing the program for the students of the high school,** distributing leaflets with all the information they need and how many hours would their participation take. This is important because the community service which provides the frames of this program requires 50 hours from the students according to the Hungarian rules. The session ends by giving out application forms to them which they need to fill by the given deadline. Also, they need to discuss their participation with their parents so that we have their permission (for taking photos too).

7. **Step: Collecting the application forms from the high school** and having a final number of candidates. The students had to fill which role they would prefer (mentor/program organizer), questions regarding their motivation, experience, permission by their parents and also the fact whether they can attend the training (which was a criteria for participation).
8. **Step: Training of young helpers** taking two afternoons (3 hours per afternoon). If the students come from different classes, a few introductory games should be played so they can get to know each other. After these a game can be played in which step into the shoes of a child who has some disadvantage (migrant background, sickness, difficult family background, financial problem in the family). The aim is to experience on their own skin the level of exclusion and discrimination this child might face. You can find the detailed description of this game here: http://www.eycb.coe.int/compasito/chapter_4/4_29.asp
9. Another game which can be played is the 'Field of landmines' which is about cooperation, leading and supporting the other person you are in charge of followed by a discussion about the roles of the mentor. You can find the detailed description of this game here: <http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/Minefield.html> Moreover a very practical activity can be to organize different types of programs while looking at the time frame, required staff, responsibilities and budget. The training should be finished by asking for their feedback about who chooses which role.
10. **Step: Choosing the mentors and the program organisers.** Here the focus should be on their performance and our own impression after the training, but their preference should be also taken into consideration of course. Those students who proved to be ready for the task of a mentor, e.g. they are confident enough to assist individual help to a 10-12 year old child, will be offered the role of a mentor. Those who are not ready or they prefer to organize and facilitate events instead, will be offered the role of a program organizer.

PROGRAM ORGANISERS

Working structure: Straight after the training the program organisers have their first meeting. Together with the coordinator they organize the first community program and put together the program plan. This should include all responsibilities, tools and games ready to use. Meetings are set up biweekly to both organize and evaluate the community programs.

11. **Step: Setting up the mentor-mentee pairs:** matching the pairs according to the interest of the candidates, the subjects that one needs help in (mentee)/is good at (mentor), the description provided by the teachers of the primary school (about their family feedback, and the needs) and our own intuition from the meeting. **Tip: if during the first meeting there is a pair which does not seem to match, and the pairs were not announced yet, the coordinator can still change the pairs in a way that they fit better. Noone will realize!**



- 12. Step: 1st mentor-mentee meeting:** introductory games this time for the whole group, followed by the announcement of who is in pair with whom. The session should be finished with repeating the rules to everyone and setting up their own times of the meetings.

MENTORS

Working structure: Mentoring starts after the first mentor-mentee meeting individually in the times set up at the first meeting. It lasts until 10 weeks. Mentors also meet biweekly to discuss how the mentoring is going: what are the difficulties, what kind of tips they can give to each other. It can be useful to talk about the role of the mentor and refresh what they learned during the training.

- 13. Step: Community program (followed biweekly).** Various indoor and outdoor programs organized according to the group's interest.
- 14. Step: Goodbye party.** After 10 weeks of mentoring and community programs organized biweekly, the last event is about evaluating the time we spent together, saying goodbye to each other and creating a poster of 'Me and my mentor in 2050'. We cleared that this mentor-mentee cooperation has come to an end, but the pairs can be still in touch if they want but not in this form.

Evaluation phase

- 15. Step: Last meeting with the mentors.** Evaluation, administration, the importance of closing their mentoring with their pairs individually. Written feedbacks and administrating their hours (in the frames of the community service). Highlighting the importance for meeting with their mentees for the last time and saying goodbye to them in private.
- 16. Step: Last meeting with the program organizers.** Evaluation, administration, tips of how to make the programs more attractive.
- 17. Step: Evaluation meeting with the teachers of the primary school,** tips about how to improve the coordination.