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RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR WORK AND SOCIETY

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE MENTORING PRACTICES FOR MIGRANT NEWCOMERS

Guidelines for social mentoring programs for newcomers

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Orient8

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1 | Introduction

1.1 The orient8 project

Social mentoring for newcomers is a new and emerging type of mentoring that has particularly gained in popularity in the wake of the European 'refugee crisis.' While social participation is considered a key dimension of successful migrant integration, host countries often prioritize the labour market integration of newcomers. To address the need for social participation initiatives, social mentoring programs for newcomers have proliferated in many migrant-receiving countries in recent years. They are known by a multitude of names including 'buddy programs', 'parrainage', 'mentoring', 'patenschaften.'… While initially driven by civil society, this intervention has become increasingly institutionalised in some European countries as exemplified by its prominent role in Flemish integration policy which will go into effect in September 2022 and seeks to strengthen newcomers' social network and participation with the help of, among other options, social mentoring. In this respect social mentoring will become a formal part of integration policies (Reidsma & De Cuyper, 2021).

As a new and barely studied field, good practices of social mentoring for newcomers are largely unknown or anecdotal. While a meta-analysis of mentoring programs shows that mentoring programs are generally effective, the effects are limited in size (Eby et al., 2007; Dekker et al., 2013). In some instances, negative effects may even occur (see e.g. Rhodes, 2002). As such, it is argued that the final design of the program or how one develops mentoring in practice will, to a large extent, determine its effects (Escudero, 2018).

These guidelines were developed to gain a better understanding of effective practices in social mentoring for newcomers in order to ensure that newcomers can benefit from quality mentoring. It is part of the larger AMIF project ORIENT8 which brings together HIVA-KU Leuven, Beyond the Horizon ISSG vzw, the Municipality of Mechelen (Belgium), the Municipality of Nikaia-Agios Ioannis Rentis (Greece), and the Municipality of Sala (Sweden). With the aim of developing an evidence-based social mentoring program for newcomers, the partners worked together on a number of outputs including:

- A set of guidelines for social mentoring for newcomers that delves further into effective mentoring practices. It is this output that is covered in this publication.
- An evaluation framework to assess the practices and impact of social mentoring programs for newcomers.
- A smart matching tool: a tool helping mentoring coordinators to match mentors and mentees using machine learning algorithms.

1.2 Social mentoring for newcomers: a working definition

As a starting point for our research there is a need to define and demarcate the concept of social mentoring for newcomers. While general definitions of mentoring offer a starting point, the unique challenges, objectives, and context of social mentoring for newcomers demand a definition that distinguishes it from other types of mentoring and bring together under one umbrella those initiatives that seek to facilitate the social integration of newcomer immigrants.

Even though there is no single definition of mentoring, one of the more traditional and generally applicable

definitions defines mentoring as "a transformative relationship in which an experienced person helps a less experienced person realize their personal and professional goals" (Kram, 1985; Levinson, 1978, in Yip & Kram, 2017, p. 88).

Many researchers have built and expanded on this definition though some defining characteristics remain similar across the diverse range of definitions.

When looking at similar forms of mentoring like 'mentoring-to-work' for newcomers. De Cuyper et al. (2019) identified seven 'building blocks' for migrant mentoring to work, which also provide useful insights for our research. The seven key attributes are:

1. The mentor has more knowledge and experience about a set objective than the mentee
2. The mentoring relationship facilitates the growth of the mentee
3. The mentoring relationship has an objective that is clear to both parties
4. The relationship between the mentor and mentee is the active ingredient of mentoring and while not a goal itself, it is a pre-condition necessary to work towards other objectives
5. The mentor and mentee voluntarily commit to the mentoring relationship
6. While asymmetrical, the mentoring relationship is reciprocal in nature
7. A third actor (organisation) facilitates and supervises the mentoring relationship

Using the seven building blocks, De Cuyper et al. (2019, p. 117) arrive at the following definition of migrant mentoring to work:

> *A person with more localised experience (mentor) provides guidance to a person with less experience (mentee), the objective of which is to support the mentee in making sustainable progress in his or her journey into the labour market. Both mentor and mentee voluntarily commit to this and establish contact on a regular basis. The relationship is initiated, facilitated, and supported by a third actor (organisation). While asymmetrical, the mentoring relationship is of a reciprocal nature.*

Through our research into social mentoring programs for newcomers, we find that all seven attributes are supported by practitioners. Another interesting definition is the one used by Prieto-Flores & Feu Gelis (2018) who define social mentoring programs as "those programs that encourage new peer or group relationships with the aim of influencing the social inclusion of people who are at risk of social exclusion" (p. 151).

Taking these definitions which are applicable to a similar target group (De Cuyper et al., 2019) and type of mentoring (Prieto-Flores & Feu Gelis, 2018), we can begin to formulate a definition for social mentoring for migrant newcomers. To distinguish the definition of social mentoring for newcomers from other forms of mentoring, we further specify its target groups (members of the host society and migrant newcomers) as well as its overarching goal (to support the social participation and integration of the mentee). In doing so, we arrive at the following definition for social mentoring for newcomers:

> *A person from the host society (mentor) provides guidance to a migrant newcomer (mentee), the objective of which is to support the social participation and integration of the mentee. Both mentor and mentee voluntarily commit to this and establish contact on a regular basis. The relationship is initiated, facilitated, and supported by a third actor (organisation). While asymmetrical, the mentoring relationship is of a reciprocal nature.*

1.3 Methodology

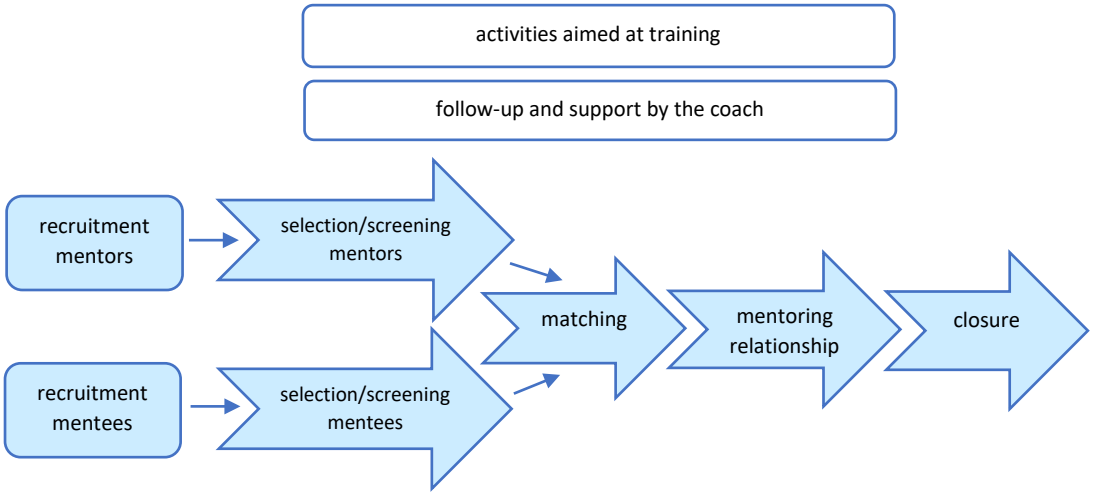
As noted previously, the field of social mentoring for newcomers is new and scientific research on effective practices lacking. The mentoring process is however similar when it comes to different kinds of mentoring.

Broadly speaking, each mentoring program has the same structure with a variation in modalities (see figure 1.1).

Concretely, we distinguish the following components:

- **Recruitment** of mentors and mentees: this includes all activities aimed at guiding mentors and mentees to the mentoring program;
- **Selection and screening** of mentors and mentees: during this step, mentors and mentees are assessed based on their eligibility for the program and their characteristics and needs;
- **Matching** mentors and mentees: the process of determining the most suitable match for mentors and mentees;
- The actual **mentoring relationship** during which mentors and mentees engage in activities together at regular intervals and for a certain duration in order to achieve the objectives of the program;
- **Closing**: the (formal) ending of the mentoring relationship and process
- **Follow-up and support** for mentors and mentees throughout the mentoring process;
- **Training** for mentors and mentees to improve their mentoring relationship and its outcomes.

Figure 1.1: the mentoring process



Source: De Cuyper e.a. (2022)

To write these guidelines we started from these components and relied on several sources to get insight in effective practices within social mentoring for newcomers related to these components.

A literature review focusing on effective practices within social mentoring for newcomers. This literature review was expanded to include 'migrant mentoring' and 'social mentoring' because there was virtually no scientific research conducted within the field of social mentoring for newcomers.

As the research on social mentoring for newcomers is limited, the guidelines mainly rely on 10 Flemish cases. Our goal was to include a diverse but representative range of initiatives. Since we are interested in best practices, critical success factors and lessons learned, we only included initiatives with at least several years of experience to ensure that their input is sufficiently based on experience. We ensured a diverse range of cities, ranging from the largest Flemish city of Antwerp (>525.000) to the small city of Izegem (<30.000). This diversity in location and scale could prove useful in determining whether certain best practices are dependent on such contextual criteria. What works in a large city might not work or be critical to the success of an initiative in a small city, and vice versa. Taking such factors into consideration will ensure the applicability of the guidelines to all three partner cities as well as the EU community at large.

Other criteria we took into account were the organization and governance of the initiative, the target group, the duration of the mentoring relationship, the type of mentoring offered, and the matching method. Some of the cases are for example organized by a local government (Izegem), a government agency (Fedasil), an NGO (Halle

Zonder Grenzen) or through a partnership between multiple actors (2START, Curant). Even though we solely included social mentoring initiatives for newcomers in our search, the target group still differed slightly within that category to include newcomers in general (Hasselt, Leuven, Izegem), asylum seekers in reception centres (Fedasil, Samen Gentenaar, Tandem), newcomer families (Tandem), and unaccompanied young adults between the ages of 17 and 22 (Curant). Other cases direct their initiatives at vulnerable groups in general but specifically mention newcomers as one of their target groups (Sinimaat, Compagnons). The type of mentoring may differ significantly, even within one initiative or mentoring relationship depending on the issues faced by individual newcomers. We identified several types of mentoring (which may overlap or coexist) such as mentoring focused on practical and administrative assistance, social activities, cultural activities, housing, learning the language, sports, and emotional support. Mentors and newcomers are typically matched based on common interests but other factors such as age, gender, language, attitudes, and preferences may be considered depending on the initiative. Matching may be done by an assigned individual within the organization (2START), by local reception centres employees with minimal input from the organisation (Fedasil), or by a partner specifically involved in the initiative for that purpose (Curant).

The criteria are informed by the objectives of the Orient8 project. One of the goals of the project is the development of a smart matching tool. By including a range of initiatives with various matching methods and criteria, we will gain a better understanding of best practices and critical success factors for matching, which will help us improve our own matching tool. The guidelines will also cover the other key dimensions of social mentoring programs. Taking into account all these elements, the diversity of the selected initiatives will help us better understand what works for whom, where, when and why.

The ten selected Flemish cases are as follows:

1. Fedasil (nationwide)
2. Curant (Antwerp)
3. Thuis in Menen (TIM)
4. Samen Thuis in Hasselt
5. Leuven buddywerking
6. Halle Zonder Grenzen
7. IN-Gent: Samen Gentenaar
8. IN-Gent: Tandem
9. Compagnons (Oostende & Bruges)
10. Izegem buddywerking

In total we conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with 17 project coordinators and staff members, and 8 participants, conducted between April and August of 2021. In our interviews with coordinators and staff, we asked exploratory questions about the different dimension of the mentoring process and followed up with more directed questions to gather their insights on criteria found in the research literature. Additionally, we received and analysed relevant documents from each social mentoring program. These include intake forms, recruitment materials, information brochures and leaflets, newsletters, grant applications, and materials for information and training sessions, some of which the researchers also attended. We then coded the data and conducted a thematic analysis in order to identify common themes and patterns.

In addition to our main data sources, we also gathered information from the 'learning network' which was set up in early 2021 to prepare for the introduction of the new fourth pillar to the Flemish integration policy in January 2022. The new pillar, which seeks to strengthen newcomers' social network and increase their participation in society through mentoring, internships, volunteering, and other similar initiatives, was tested in 26 municipalities in Flanders (Belgium). A 'learning network' was set up in order to support the pilot projects and gather experiences and knowledge that will help other municipalities prepare for and implement successful fourth pillar initiatives. For the guidelines, we consulted notes from three learning network meetings as well as experiences, insights, and documents shared with the researchers and on the network's digital sharing platform.

The guidelines seek to integrate and systematise the insights from all the sources mentioned above as much as possible while leaving the possibility for future adjustments and additions. In composing the guidelines, we draw on both 'science-based evidence,' or evidence from scientific literature, and 'practice-based evidence' meaning evidence based on practitioners' experiences of developing and implementing social mentoring programs for newcomers. As mentioned previously, there is still a severe lack of research on social mentoring for newcomers so for the purpose of this handbook, we mainly rely on 'practice-based evidence.'

It should finally be noted that these guidelines are a starting point from which to gradually add more and more 'evidence' about what works and what does not in the context of social mentoring for newcomers. As the ORIENT8 project progresses and the three partner municipalities advance with the social mentoring program, so will the guidelines based on their experiences. We will also add insights from international best practices in the final version of these guidelines.

1.4 Structure of the guidelines

In a first chapter of the guidelines the concept of 'social mentoring' is defined. The next chapters are structured according to the mentoring process.

For each of these components, we have done the following:

- First, we examine which practices are considered (in)effective based on scientific research. Since research on social mentoring for newcomers is very limited to date, these sections will be relatively short and incorporate research on other types of mentoring such as mentoring at work and youth mentoring.
- Second, we discuss the experiences from practice and outline different modalities or modes of implementation.
- Third, we offer a list of recommendations based on our findings in the previous two sections.
- Finally, we provide several case examples, tools, and instruments for illustrative purposes.

2 | Recruiting mentors and mentees

One of the first steps of any mentoring program is the recruitment of its participants. In this chapter, we discuss elements relevant to recruitment such as recruitment channels and methods as well as recruitment materials and the content of such materials. After briefly discussing the limited research that is available on the topic, we present experiences from practice and outline different modalities in terms of recruitment. Based on our findings, we finally offer a list of recommendations for the recruitment of mentors and mentees for social mentoring programs for newcomers.

2.1 According to the literature

Research on recruitment strategies is limited and predominantly descriptive. While it can illustrate common practices, it does not provide evidence for the effectiveness of certain recruitment channels and strategies. Which type of recruitment will work best will be largely determined by the context of a mentoring program. Existing quality labels within the broader field of mentoring that are often supported by research do emphasize the importance of accurate and realistic information about what the program entails. Sanyal (2017) found that recruitment of mentees who do not fully understand the context and expectations of the program can have a negative impact on the mentoring relationship and result in premature termination. The importance of collaboration with other organizations and networking is also emphasized (De Cuyper et al., 2021). Purkayashta & De Cuyper (2019) refer to this as a multi-stakeholder approach.

Limited research does exist on the importance of word-of-mouth recruitment. An evaluation of the Canadian Host program, which targeted newcomers, found that one-third of participants was recruited through word of mouth (CIC, 2010). An Australian study on the Given the Chance Project (Mestan, 2008), which focused on refugees, cited word of mouth as a key recruitment strategy. In general, volunteerism increases when people are directly asked to participate in a voluntary activity by someone they know. Such personal connections also help to create positive views of the organization and activity (Furano et al., 1993; Stukas & Tanti, 2005; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). However, research suggests that programs should use more than one recruitment method to reach potential candidates (MENTOR, 2015; Mestan, 2008) and that recruitment messages should be received by prospective volunteers on more than one occasion to be effective (MENTOR, 2015).

2.2 In practice

2.2.1 Recruiting mentors

In the recruitment phase, we can distinguish between a number of elements, namely the actual channels through which a program recruits its participants and the available methods that are used for this, the materials that programs use and the message that those materials convey. In this section, we provide an overview of such elements for the recruitment of mentors.

Table 1 Mentor recruitment

Channels and methods
Website of the project/organisation
External websites such as general volunteering websites
Social media: facebook, twitter, instagram, youtube
Traditional media: newspapers, magazines, radio
Internal recruitment (e.g., volunteers from other projects of the organization)
Retention of current mentors
Other organisations: cities and municipalities, civil society and/or volunteer organisations
Word-of-mouth
Targeted recruitment
Materials
Brochures, posters and flyers
Presentations
Online promotional content: videos, photos, articles, social media posts
Newsletters

2.2.1.1 Channels and methods

In practice, social mentoring programs for newcomers use a variety of recruitment channels and methods to recruit new mentors. Van Dooren and De Cuyper (2015) distinguish between passive and active recruitment. Passive recruitment occurs via the general marketing channels of a program such as via a website, social media, and flyers whereas active recruitment requires a more direct action on the part of the organization such as giving a presentation or sharing information at an event. While some social mentoring programs ask new candidates how they found or learned about the program, this is not done on a structural basis and most programs do not keep data on the most common and effective channels.

Nevertheless, several recruitment channels stand out among the programs when it comes to the recruitment of mentors. Many volunteers find programs 'by themselves' meaning they deliberately search for mentoring programs for newcomers or similar volunteering opportunities in terms of the type of work and/or the target group. This is where programs can benefit significantly from their own as well as external channels, both online and elsewhere. Organisations advertise their mentoring programs on their own website, social media and via materials such as brochures and flyers.

An example of a unique recruitment campaign

At the end of 2019, the mentoring program in Leuven opted for a rather unique recruitment strategy. They distributed new year's cards with the message 'we wish you a buddy for 2020'. Similar messages were also shown on screens in city hall and in front of the city's university buildings. The campaign garnered a lot of attention and gave the program a boost. Nowadays, they primarily rely on word-of-mouth advertising.

To increase their reach among the population, most programs also advertise via external channels such as UNHCR, Give a Day, 11.11.11, and the Flemish Center for Volunteering. Recruitment via traditional channels such as newspapers, magazines, and radio are less common but still used by some, especially in smaller municipalities.

Mentoring programs that are organized by local governments or larger organisations also regularly benefit from internal recruitment where volunteers transfer between programs of the same organisation or agency. Well-known and established organisers can thus benefit from an already existing network and volunteer base to build and expand their mentoring program.

However, some programs may opt to supplement their regular recruitment channels mentioned above with more targeted recruitment methods. A targeted approach can be particularly useful when an organisation wishes to diversify their mentor pool, recruit volunteers with specific skillsets or backgrounds, or recruit a mentor with a particular mentee in mind (i.e., recruiting on a case-by-case basis).

An example of targeted recruitment

The coordinator of the mentoring program in Izegem calls local schools to ask for the contact information of teachers who are retiring that same year in the hopes of recruiting them as a mentor.

Once a mentoring program has become more well known among the local population, word-of-mouth advertising often becomes an important recruitment channel. While interested candidates may find a program via this channel, programs do strongly suggest combining word-of-mouth recruitment with other recruitment channels and strategies. According to one coordinator, relying too much on passive recruitment such as word-of-mouth can create a false sense of security that could harm recruitment efforts over time as programs start to neglect innovation, fall behind competing programs, and lose some of their name recognition among new generations and hitherto untapped groups in the local community.

Keeping up with the times

When Compagnons started in 2016, their first few info sessions would often attract 60 to 70 attendees, with about 50 of them immediately signing up for the program during the event. Over time, as the novelty wore off and the number of local projects targeted at newcomers increased, it became more and more difficult to attract new mentors. To breathe new life into the program, coordinators recently overhauled their entire approach. They improved their internal organisation, changed the structure of the program, and updated their lay-out in hopes of attracting a new and younger group of volunteers. While such tasks are usually not high on the list of a coordinator's responsibilities and priorities, it is often necessary to ensure the durability of a program.

While new programs benefit from their novelty as people flock to what is new, fresh, and exciting, retention of mentors becomes an important recruitment strategy the longer a program is operative. By retaining their mentors, programs can build a reliable pool of volunteers and help to improve the longevity of their program.

2.2.1.2 Materials and message

In addition to the channels and methods that facilitate the recruitment of mentors, it is also important to pay attention to the message that is conveyed to potential candidates via such channels. Programs often use flyers, posters, brochures, newsletters, and online content such as videos and social media posts to recruit mentors. One element that many programs emphasise is that the materials that programs use for recruitment do not merely provide a promotional message but also set expectations early on. Coordinators especially stress the importance of clearly defining the role of a mentor and what is – and, importantly, what is not – expected from them during the mentoring relationship with a mentee.

Using mentor testimonials that highlight the added value as well as the difficulties or limitations of mentoring is recommended by multiple mentoring organisations. By having (former) participants talk about their own experiences, potential candidates can get a better 'feel' for the program and and the role they will be expected to fulfil. Visual tools are also generally more appealing, draw the attention and will make a program stand out from its competitors.

UNHCR recruitment campaign

To promote social mentoring projects in Belgium, UNHCR published several video testimonials in which mentors and mentees talk about their experience with social mentoring as part of a larger recruitment campaign. According to Samen Gentenaar, one of the programs who participated in the recruitment campaign, this was a wonderful opportunity for them which boosted their program once the videos went viral on social media.

Testimonials

The mentoring program in Leuven provides a video testimonial on their own website in which a duo talks about their experiences and the benefits of participating in the program. Similarly, Fedasil offers written mentor testimonials on their mentor recruitment page as does Halle.

Examples of other recruitment materials

- *Fedasil* 'word buddy' *flyers*

Case Tandem

Tandem is a social mentoring program in Ghent, Belgium that matches newcomer families with mentors. The mentor speaks Dutch and the mother tongue or other language spoken by the family. Together, they will do recreational activities for a period of six months and get to know organizations in the city of Ghent whose services match the needs of the family. To recruit families, Tandem works together with referrers. Their cooperation follows a number of successive steps:

1. The referrer contacts Tandem when they want to register a family for the mentoring program
2. The program coordinator provides the referrer with an intake form and the promo video of the program
3. The referrer shows the promo video to the family, fills in the intake form - preferably together with the family - and sends it back
4. The coordinator decides whether the newcomers can participate based on the program's participation criteria which are:

    - They are a family
    - The family lives in Ghent, their living situation is stable
    - The family is intrinsically motivated to participate in the mentoring program
    - The family can commit themselves to do activities with the mentor twice a month for 6 months
    - The family is willing to participate in group activities and training sessions
    - The family agrees with the arrangements made by the organization with the mentor and the family
    - The family agrees with the objectives of Tandem and respects the framework
    - The family is willing to sign the organization's privacy policy document during the start-up meeting

5. The coordinator reports the decision back to the referrer. There are three possible scenarios:

    - **The family can participate immediately**. If the family complies with all the participation criteria and a mentor is available, the family can start their traject at Tandem. The coordinator will contact the referrer, the mentor, and the family to schedule a first meeting
    - **The family cannot participate in Tandem**. The coordinator contacts the referrer and explains why the family cannot participate
    - **The family is placed on the waiting list**. If the family can participate but there is no mentor available, they will be placed on the waiting list. The coordinator will start looking for a mentor. As soon as a mentor is available, the coordinator will contact the referrer and the family

6. If the family qualifies and a mentor is available, the coordinator schedules a first meeting with the mentor, the family, and the referrer
7. Ideally, the mentor and family are given some time to consider the match and, if they want to move forward, invited for a final start-up meeting (this has not been implemented yet)

2.2.2 Recruiting mentees

There are numerous strategies for the recruitment of mentees, many of which are similar to the approaches used for mentor recruitment. Again, a distinction can be made between active and passive forms of recruitment (Van Dooren and De Cuyper, 2015). While it is difficult to make conclusive statements about the effectiveness of a specific recruitment strategy, some mentee recruitment strategies are decidedly more common and favoured among social mentoring programs.

Table 2 Mentee recruitment

Channels and methods
Website of the project/organisation
Social media: facebook, twitter, instagram, youtube
Traditional media: newspapers, magazines, radio
Internal recruitment (e.g., via other services/projects of the mentoring organization)
Partnerships and referrals from other organisations and service providers: social worker, language and civic integration teachers, schools, public employment services, Public Centres for Social Welfare, integration services, asylum centres, cities and municipalities
Active information dissemination (e.g., giving presentations in language classes)
Word-of-mouth
Materials
Brochures, posters and flyers
Presentations
Online promotional content: videos, photos, articles
Newsletters

2.2.2.1 Channels and methods

While mentor recruitment relies significantly on channels such as (social) media and word-of-mouth, mentee recruitment is more heavily characterised by partnerships and referrals. As recent immigrants, potential mentees may not have the social network, language skills or familiarity with local media to learn about social mentoring programs via the channels that are commonly used to attract mentors. They are, however, usually in contact with practitioners and service providers, particularly during the early stages of arrival and integration. Most social mentoring programs that target newcomers thus initiate informal partnerships with organisations and other service providers that are regularly in contact with the intended target group of the mentoring program. Common examples of such partners include social workers, language and civic integration teachers, schools, public employment services, Public Centres for Social Welfare, integration agencies and services, and asylum centers.

Recruitment: a mentee's perspective

"I heard about it from other refugees in the beginning, but I didn't know what it was all about. I asked my social worker and they explained it all and after that, I signed up. At that point, I had just received refugee status, ended up in [city] and I did not have enough friends. I wanted someone to help me with schoolwork et cetera. I heard from someone else that the mentor helped them with their driver's license. This was not the case for me, but I directly got the sense that it wasn't just about that but also about doing things together, going on a city trip, doing a hobby together. So, what I wanted was to match with someone who already lived in [city] and follow them a bit to find my way."

To recruit mentees via such organisations and services, mentoring programs inform partners of the specificities of the mentoring program and make agreements about who can be referred to the program, ask permission to distribute flyers, brochures, and posters at the premises of the partner organisation, and send information about the program to employees of the organisation or service. Based on such information, partners will refer suitable mentee candidates to the mentoring program.

Even though cooperating with external partners is one of the most common channels for the recruitment of newcomer mentees, it does come with its own challenges. By relying on others for referrals, programs lose some control over the recruitment process. Coordinators identified various challenges that are common in partnership-based recruitment such as insufficient communication between partners, and sporadic and/or unsuitable referrals. This last problem usually occurs because partners are not sufficiently informed or knowledgeable about the selection and participation criteria of the mentoring program, refer newcomers for needs that require professional assistance rather than volunteer services, or refer people without informing them (properly) what it is they are signing up for. Most mentoring program coordinators, for example, recalled intake interviews with candidates who clearly lacked a basic understanding of the program and its objectives, thought it was a required part of their integration, and/or did not appear motivated to commit to a mentoring relationship.

Such challenges spurred changes in the partnership-based recruitment strategies of mentoring organisations. One program chose to prioritise referrals from Second Language teachers who appeared more attuned to the individual needs and suitability of their newcomer pupils than their social workers. To improve communication between the mentoring organisation and its partners, ensure partners convey correct and up to date information to the target group and refer suitable candidates to the program, another program introduced annual meetings with their main partners. During this meeting, they give a presentation in which they reiterate the purpose of the mentoring program, the target group, participation criteria, the role of the mentor, the structure of the program, and any other relevant information or updates referrers need to be aware of. By learning from common challenges and introducing small changes to their recruitment strategy, programs can significantly reduce the screening and selection needs during the next phase of the mentoring program.

How to ensure candidates are motivated and willing

The social mentoring program of the municipality of Leuven asks their referrers to obtain permission from a potential candidate before referring them to the mentoring program and initiating the application process.

Improving the quality of referrals

Tandem developed an 'information flow' document for their partners which covers topics such as the goals of the program, the role of the mentor, participation criteria, an overview of the mentoring process, and what is expected from the referrer. The document is regularly updated and shared with partners to ensure optimal cooperation and referral.

While programs often rely on external partners for their recruitment of mentees, they may also adopt more active recruitment methods such as presenting the mentoring program in a language class for newcomers. A significant benefit of this approach is the direct communication between program staff and the target group during the recruitment phase which takes away some of the risks associated with referrals. Nevertheless, time constraints make this a less popular recruitment strategy among mentoring programs.

Quite a few mentoring organisations note that once a program has become better known among the target group and other organisations and a growing number of mentees have participated, word-of-mouth advertising can take over from other recruitment channels. This is particularly the case when a mentoring program is organized by a well-known organisation or service provider such as a municipality, a local agency for integration, or an established non-profit organisation. Most newcomers will become familiar with such organisations and

agencies upon or soon after arrival and might even benefit from other services and programs they offer. If newcomers are interested in the mentoring program, they will thus often apply out of their own volition or can be easily identified and recruited through internal recruitment channels of the organization or agency. It is nevertheless emphasized that word-of-mouth advertising should never be the only channels as not every mentee benefits from an extensive social network and it is in fact these more isolated individuals who could significantly benefit from a social mentor.

2.2.2.2 Materials and message

Materials that are often used for the recruitment of mentees include flyers, posters, brochures, presentations, and online content such as social media posts, videos, and other visuals. The main concern that social mentoring programs must take into account when developing recruitment materials for mentees are the language and communication style. Similar to mentor recruitment materials, the goal of the mentoring relationship and the role of the mentor and mentee must be explained. Programs may, however, choose to simplify the language a bit for mentees, explain certain terms they might not be familiar with (such as 'buddy', a term typically used for social mentors in Flanders but relatively unfamiliar to many newcomers), and/or offer materials in multiple languages. Visual materials such as photos, videos and other images can also draw more attention to the program than written materials and can help bridge a language barrier. An added benefit is that such materials can be used by referrers to help explain the program to potential candidates.

Recruitment flyers for mentees

For inspiration, we refer to the Tandem flyer and the Samen Gentenaar flyer.

An example from Ghent

Tandem asks their referrers to show a promotional video to interested newcomers before referring them to the mentoring program to ensure candidates are properly informed. The video is only 1 minute long and available in Somali, Pashtu, Farsi, and Arabic.

2.3 Recommendations

- ✓ Programs should use recruitment channels that are most suitable for their target group and context. It is recommended that programs use a variety of recruitment channels to attract a diverse group of candidates and improve the sustainability of the program. A mix of passive/active, internal/external, and general/targeted strategies is recommended. Programs should refrain from relying solely on word-of-mouth recruitment.
- ✓ Programs should develop a variety of promotional materials that are made readily available to the target group and referrers, online and/or via physical materials such as posters, flyers, and brochures. Promotional materials should be updated and redistributed when needed.
- ✓ If programs (want to) use referrals as one of their recruitment strategies, they should:
    - Maintain (informal) partnerships with other organisations and services who are in contact with the target group(s) of the program.
    - Ask referrers to inform potential candidates about the program, show them promotional materials, and obtain their permission to initiate the application process.
    - Keep referrers informed about the program and communicate any changes to its participation or selectin criteria or other key aspects of the program in a timely manner.
    - Provide referrers with promotional materials to attract the target group and help them to explain the program to interested candidates before referring them to the program.
    - Supplement referrals with other recruitment strategies to effectively reach the intended target group.
- ✓ Programs should use simple, visual tools, clear language, and translation tools to explain the purpose of social mentoring, the specificities of the program, and the role of mentor and mentee to ensure participants enter the program with appropriate expectations.

3 | Screening and selecting mentors and mentees

After the recruitment of potential mentors and mentees, programs will have to screen and select candidates to ensure that participants are a good fit for the program. When it comes to screening and selection, a distinction can be made between the selection criteria that are used by a mentoring program and the actual method of screening and selection. We will discuss both in this chapter. After briefly discussing the limited research that is available on the topic, we present experiences from practice. Based on our findings, we conclude with a list of recommendations for the screening and selection of mentors and mentees for social mentoring for newcomers.

3.1 According to the literature

Successful screening of candidates lays the foundation for a successful match and can significantly reduce the likelihood of problems in the mentoring relationship (Bradshaw & Haddock, 1998; DuBois et al., 2002). While there is a lack of literature on the screening and selection of mentors and mentees, particularly in terms of social mentoring and/or mentoring for newcomers, research on other types of mentoring such as mentoring to work and youth mentoring, provide some relevant insights.

In a literature and 'best practices' review conducted in the framework of the Memore project (2019), Purkayastha and De Cuyper conclude that a clear formulation of screening criteria is important for the success of a mentoring to work program for two reasons. First, clear criteria ensure that only a specific group of the population is targeted. Second, by being aware that there is a link between certain criteria and successful outcomes, a program can better ensure the success of the mentoring relationship and the program in general. To promote a successful outcome, Purkayastha and De Cuyper (2019) point out that the screening criteria should be closely aligned with the objectives of the mentoring program.

When determining whether a candidate will be a good fit for the mentoring program, Van Robaeys & Lyssens-Danneboom (2016) found that almost 60% of the programs in their evaluation research on mentoring programs in Flanders use a desired candidate 'profile' based on a set of selection criteria. They found that programs commonly use criteria such as age (usually 18+), personal stability and resilience, an open attitude - particularly in terms of diversity and difference – and commitment (availability, willingness to participate in training, openness to feedback and follow-up) to the program. According to Van Dooren and De Cuyper (2015), motivation is one of the most important factors in a successful relationship and thus a crucial participation criterion. The importance of participants' motivation is further underscored by Behnia (2007) and Van 't Hoog et al. (2012).

In addition to motivation, many authors emphasise the importance of taking participants' expectations into consideration during the screening and selection phase. In his study on effective mentors and mentees, Sanyal (2017) notes that mentees who enter a mentoring program without fully understanding the context and expectations of the program are detrimental to its success. Madia and Lutz (2004) studied Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs and found that a discrepancy between a mentor's initial expectations of the mentoring relationship and their actual post-match experiences can significantly influence the relationship. Mentors with high negative discrepancies between their expectations and experiences reported less relationship depth, were less likely to report that they 'liked' their mentees and were less likely to express an interest to remain in the relationship (Madia & Lutz, 2004). According to the authors, these findings underline the importance of assessing - and if

needed, adjusting - candidates' expectations.

To set realistic expectations early on, MENTOR (2015) suggests providing prospective candidates with written eligibility criteria. By adequately describing the requirements, rewards and challenges of mentoring, program can avoid unfulfilled expectations and unsuccessful relationships. However, unrealistic expectations might be cause for dismissal, as Van Robaeys and Lyssens-Danneboom (2016) found. As lack of agreement between the expectations of a mentor and the program was an important reason for refusal among the mentoring programs they studied.

In terms of the actual method of screening, research primarily focuses on (the benefits of) personal intake interviews. To check whether candidates are suitable to participate in the mentoring program, Van Robaeys and Lyssens-Danneboom (2016) found that the vast majority (89%) of programs opt for an oral interview. Similarly, a guide by Foreningen Nydansker (2017) based on the experiences of three mentoring programs for highly skilled refugees recommends using a combination of profile forms and (telephone) interviews during the screening phase. Van Dooren and De Cuyper (2015) have identified several benefits of personal intake interviews: 1) it allows for more detailed information about the needs and wishes of the mentee to be obtained, 2) it can give insight into a candidate's personality, 3) it makes it easier to gauge the motivation and drive of a candidate, and 4) a candidate's expectations can be checked and adjusted if needed. Especially the last two benefits are crucial for a mentoring relationship to be successful and to avoid frustration and drop-out.

3.2 In practice

3.2.1 Screening and selecting mentors

When it comes to screening and selecting mentors, we make a distinction between, on the one hand, the selection criteria used by the mentoring program and the actual method of screening and selection on the other hand.

3.2.1.1 Selection criteria

Program coordinators must screen potential mentors to determine if they are a good fit for the mentoring program. To do so, they rely on a set of selection criteria. In the following table, we have listed some of the most common criteria for the selection of mentors in social mentoring programs for newcomers.

Table 3 Mentor selection criteria

Expectations
Personality characteristics
Motivation
Age
Language skills
Place of residence
Availability and ability to commit to the program

Selection criteria can be diverse. They are informed by the objectives of the mentoring program, the profile of the mentee(s), and the way in which a mentor and mentee will be matched. Since social mentoring relationships are relatively informal, participation criteria tend to be less strict than for many other types of mentoring programs. Criteria can range from a minimum age to having the right expectations. Below are some examples of the most common selection criteria.

Selecting by age

Programs typically have a minimum age requirement with 18+ being the most common. While younger people can mentor, this usually falls outside the scope of social mentoring programs for newcomers which tend to focus on adults. Even though the minimum age requirement for mentees is not always strictly applied, the age requirement for mentors usually is to ensure candidates have the maturity and experience needed to be a good mentor to a newcomer.

Selection criteria in practice

In an official vacancy for mentors, Thuis in Menen explains their ideal mentor as follows:

- ✓ *Someone who is motivated*
- ✓ *Available for half a day once a week*
- ✓ *Has basic knowledge of English or French*
- ✓ *Is open to other cultures*
- ✓ *Can deal with the context of an asylum seeker in a healthy way*
- ✓ *Able to keep a distance*
- ✓ *Has a positive attitude and likes to share this with others*

Selection criteria in practice

Compagnons Bruges expects the following from their mentors (you can read their mentor vacancy here):

- ✓ *You are sociable and have a healthy dose of empathy*
- ✓ *You like to show people around your city*
- ✓ *You have a feel for diversity and want to get to work with our superdiverse constituency*
- ✓ *You have time (about two times per month) and feel like sharing your free time with someone*
- ✓ *You live in Bruges and know the city well*
- ✓ *You speak Dutch*

While speaking the local language is a basic selection criterion for mentoring programs, the required level of comprehension can differ based on the goals of the program.

An alternative approach

Tandem is social a mentoring program that matches newcomer families with ex-newcomers as well as people with a migration background who speak the same language as well as (some level of) Dutch. "Personally, I think it is an added value for both the organisation and the participating families that the mentors are persons with a migration background who themselves have often gone through an integration process. Because of this, the mentors have insights, experiences, and are often able to assess the reality and the needs of the participating families."

Criteria which are more difficult to screen for than age or language but are deemed particularly important by mentoring programs include a candidate's expectations, personality, and motivation. In terms of expectations, programs stress the importance of ensuring that a mentor candidate's expectations align with the expectations and objectives of the program and the mentees.

During the screening and selection phase, programs often have a certain 'profile' in mind which defines their ideal, or at least preferable, mentor. In terms of personality, characteristics that are typically desired include being social, having patience, being supportive, taking initiative, and showing an openness to diversity.

By sharing a detailed mentor profile via official channels and clearly communicating the selection criteria, candidates can already decide for themselves if they are the right fit for the program. There is thus already a phase of self-selection that precedes the screening and selection carried out by the program coordinator. While most candidates who are screened and selected thus comply with basic criteria such as age and language, programs can still filter out candidates on other factors such as the previously mentioned expectations and personality characteristics.

What to look for in a mentor

One of the coordinators of the mentoring program of Fedasil, the Belgian federal agency for the reception of asylum seekers, looks for someone who:

- ✓ *is enthusiastic and eager to get started*
- ✓ *has social skills, can keep a conversation going and can make others feel at ease*
- ✓ *has the right (not too high!) expectations*
- ✓ *is flexible, patient and shows perseverance to make the mentoring relationship work*

Finding the right mentor

According to one of the coordinators of Compagnons, to be a good mentor "you have to be open to diversity and be able to deal with it because there are also cultural differences, the way you meet up with people is sometimes different, sometimes not everything is clear in messages or on the phone, or there is miscommunication, misunderstanding. You can't let yourself get derwailed too easily."

Filtering out paternalism at the selection phase

One of the main concerns that several coordinators seek to address is the level of paternalism in mentoring relationships. Rather than attempting to solve paternalism once it has already become a concern in a mentor-mentee relationship, some seek to tackle it early on. During their intake, some mentor candidates place an overwhelming emphasis on newcomers' language acquisition and integration so as not to be 'a burden on society'. According to one coordinator, it is usually best to exclude candidates at this phase to retain the integrity of the program and prevent potential conflict later on in the mentoring process.

3.2.1.2 Selection procedure

Social mentoring programs for newcomers have several different selection methods at their disposal. We discuss the most common ones.

Table 4 Mentor selection methods

(Online) intake form
Face-to-face intake interview
Intake by phone or video call
Group info session

An (online) intake form is by far the most common screening and selection method used by social mentoring programs for newcomers.

Intake forms: some examples

Almost every mentoring program we interviewed for this report uses an intake form to screen and select their mentor candidates. For practical examples, please consult the intake forms used by Compagnons, Fedasil, Budd'Iz (Izegem), Leuven municipality, and Thuis in Menen.

What to include on an intake form

While there is some differentiation among intake forms, they typically include questions about:

- ✓ *Personal details: name, gender, contact information, age, marital status, and children*
- ✓ *Language skills*
- ✓ *Education and profession*
- ✓ *Hobbies and interests*
- ✓ *Motivation*
- ✓ *Availability*
- ✓ *Preferences (type of mentoring/assistance/activities, mentee profile)*

While an intake form is the most prevalent screening method among mentoring program, coordinators typically want to see and speak to a candidate before accepting them into their program. Intake forms are thus usually combined with a second screening method. Most programs prefer an individual face-to-face intake interview over interviews by phone or video call as it allows for easier communication and helps them get a better 'feel' of a candidate. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced most programs to seek temporary alternatives such as intakes by phone, video call, and other novel methods.

Creative alternatives during the pandemic

COVID-19 restrictions forced Compagnons Bruges to look for an alternative intake format. Instead of meeting candidates for an intake interview at the office of their organisation FMDO, the coordinator invited them for a one-hour 'walking intake.' During their walk, the coordinator kept the questions on the intake form in the back of their mind and once back at the office, noted down all relevant information. According to the coordinator, changing the setting of the intake to something as informal and 'active' as walking allows for more interesting conversations. Candidates will casually share information that they would not mention in a more formal office setting or might not even consider important for the coordinator to know but are yet very telling and useful for screening and matching.

While most programs opt for individual (face-to-face, online or phone) intakes, an alternative in the form of a group info session could reduce the time spent on individual intakes thus making it a particularly attractive method for large-scale mentoring programs. A group session is usually held at regular intervals, communicated to potential mentors, and advertised via a program's recruitment channels. It may replace or supplement other intake methods such as individual intakes and is often accompanied by individual intake forms, which are available during or after the info session.

Group info session

One of the Fedasil mentoring programs organises an info session for mentor candidates. The coordinator explains: "It takes about 1,5 hours. We tell something about the reception center, how a reception center works, then about the mentoring work itself so about activities they can do together, the expectations from us, expectations that they may have towards our center, how it is organized, […] and then there are always a few mentors who testify. That is always the nicest thing of course. We always try to have three mentors who talk about their experience and then they can also be asked questions. […] I find the info session to be of great value because it gives a lot of information beforehand. The mentors who were present at the info session are much better and more extensively informed, also partly because of those testimonies. Because of those testimonies, they hear what is difficult about the project, so that they do not start with false expectations."

Regardless of whether social mentoring programs opt for individual intakes or group sessions, the screening and selection phase provides an opportunity to not only learn about the candidate but also make sure they know what they are signing up for. Intakes thus have two main purposes. During an intake, coordinators will inquire about the candidate's motivations, expectations, background, and preferences while also discussing the structure and objectives of the programs and setting the right expectations. To explain what is and what is *not* expected of them, mentors are sometimes provided with a simple frame of reference that explains their role as a mentor, such as the one used by IN-Gent's Tandem program:

A mentor is…	A mentor is not…
A person who does (fun) leisure activities with the family	A Dutch teacher
A person who introduces the family to new places and organizations in the city and helps them find their way around Ghent	A person who fills out administrative documents
A person who passes on requests for help to the project coordinator	A social worker or counsellor
	A person who will look for housing, employment, …

While coordinators can and often do provide the same information during a group session as they would during an individual intake, a group session allows for more creative approaches such as involving current or former mentors of the program. The concrete examples, personal experience, and exchange between former or current mentors and new mentors that this stimulates enhances understanding and creates a community feeling among volunteers.

If the screening deems mentor candidates unsuitable for the program, they may be referred to other types of volunteering.

Referring ineligible candidates

The program of the municipality of Leuven expects their mentors to be general support figures who can offer support in various areas of life. If a candidate is primarily interested in assisting a newcomer with finding employment or housing, the program refers them to other, more targeted mentoring programs that are active in the same region.

Case Leuven

The social mentoring program in Leuven, Belgium is organized by the Diversity and Equal Opportunities office of the city of Leuven. Every few months, they organize an info session for interested volunteers. Attending the info session is a prerequisite for becoming a mentor.

During the info session, the coordinators discuss:

- The context and goals of the mentoring program
- The trajectory of a refugee including the journey, arrival, asylum process, and integration
- The newcomer profile
- The mentor profile including participation criteria, expectations, and role of mentor
- The organization of the mentoring program with an explanation of each step of the mentoring process
- The support available to the mentor including trainings, activities, and support and follow-up by the coordinator

During the info session, the coordinators show videos of mentors and mentees of the program to illustrate what mentors do in practice. If possible, they also invite a former mentor to the info session so they can share their personal experience and candidates can ask questions. According to the coordinator, visual tools and concrete examples improve candidates' understanding of the program and helps with setting the right expectations.

In the past, the coordinator organized one-on-one intakes with volunteers but due to the success of the program, individual talks were no longer feasible. Benefits of the group info session are that it requires less time, there is more exchange between volunteers and attendees usually ask more questions. A drawback is that the coordinator does not have an opportunity to talk with each mentor candidate. The matching is thus primarily based on the information provided on the candidate's intake form.

3.2.2 Screening and selecting mentees

When it comes to the screening and selection of mentees, we again make a distinction between the selection criteria that are used by the social mentoring program and the actual method of screening and selection.

3.2.2.1 Selection criteria

In the following table, we have listed the most common criteria that are used by programs to select newcomer mentees.

Table 5 Mentee selection criteria

Language skills
Age
Place of residence
Immigration status
Motivation
Expectations
Availability and ability to commit to the program
Absence of more immediate needs that require professional assistance

The exact criteria that social mentoring programs for newcomers use differ depending on their objectives, target group and structure of the program. We offer an example from practice:

Selection criteria in practice

According to Samen Gentenaar, programs should "clearly define the target group before the start. If a candidate is excluded from the program, you can refer to the pre-established criteria." The target group of Samen Gentenaar is defined as follows:

- ✓ *At least 18 years old*
- ✓ *Willing to commit to the program for six months and meet at least two times a month*
- ✓ *Endorses the program objectives with the emphasis on leisure experiences*
- ✓ *Mental capacity to bring the mentoring relationship to a successful conclusion*
- ✓ *Basic knowledge of Dutch (no formal proof needed but expect a minimum level of fluency that is rougly equivalent to level A2 (oral).*

While the criteria – and how strictly they are applied - clearly differ from program to program, several selection criteria return time and time again. A certain language comprehension is usually expected though programs differ in how they apply this criterion depending on their objectives. Some expect a minimum level of Dutch (often A2) while others merely look for any language that allows them, and a mentor, to communicate with a mentee (usually English or French in the Belgian context). Programs that see learning the language as one of the main objectives of social mentoring will usually refrain from using secondary languages such as English and may apply minimum native language requirements more strictly to facilitate language learning. However, in general, specifically defined language requirements are usually more guideline than rule.

Selection criteria in practice

Compagnons Bruges explains how they apply their language criterion in practice: "for us, the biggest requirement is that it has to be someone with whom we can communicate. I have already done intake interviews in French, English, Spanish, but we also had someone say a mentee can only speak Arabic. Then I cannot have a conversation with that person, and I cannot find a mentor because my mentors, or most of them at least, do not speak Arabic either. So, then we usually ask them to wait another month or two. We are not going to be super strict with the language, but we must be able to communicate."

Selection criteria (or the lack thereof) in practice

As previously mentioned, Tandem is a mentoring program that matches newcomer families with ex-newcomers who speak the same language as well as (some level of) Dutch. Mentees are not excluded because of their language skills. If a suitable mentor is not immediately available, the coordinator will attempt to actively recruit one who speaks the same language as the mentee, whatever language that may be. As such, Tandem is the only social mentoring program that does not have any language requirement for newcomer mentees.

The importance of the newcomer's immigration status usually depends on who organizes or finances the mentoring program. Many programs are either organized or subsidized by the (local) government and are not allowed to accept undocumented newcomers into the program. Those that are organized and financed by a non-profit tend to have a lot more leeway and often choose to accept anyone who needs assistance, regardless of their immigration status.

Coordinators furthermore emphasise the importance of screening for motivation and expectations. Candidates are often recruited via other organisations and services. While social mentoring programs expect such (informal) partners to inform newcomers and receive permission before referring them, experience shows that referrers such as the mentee's social worker are often more enthusiastic about the program than the mentee themselves. For most mentoring programs, this is cause for rejecting an application. They expect intrinsic motivation from both sides and in fact see it as a necessity to make a mentoring relationship work.

A question of intrinsic motivation

"I will also invite these newcomers to have a conversation, which sometimes shows that they do not take part based on their own request but that they are being directed a little, that the social worker says 'you have to do that because…' but it is also on a voluntary basis for our newcomers, and we must not forget that. It cannot be an obligation in the context of some agreement or contract you have concluded with the social worker, that cannot be part of it. It is voluntary work, but it is on a voluntary basis for both sides. If a newcomer immediately says 'actually, I don't want to, but I have to' then I say 'actually, you don't *have to."*
(Thuis in Menen)

The screening and selection phase also offers opportunities to ensure that potential mentees effectively understand what the participation requirements are and what benefits they can expect when entering the program. Depending on the recruitment channel, newcomer candidates might have missed out on key information or been incorrectly informed about the program by referrers or through word-of-mouth. When their expectations do not match or go far beyond the objectives of the program, there will usually be an attempt on the part of the program to manage their expectations. If this does not prove fruitful, their application will usually be rejected and if possible, referred to other organisations or services. Alternatively, programs could suggest delaying their entrance to the program until other, more urgent matters, are resolved or their language skills have been further developed. See for example Compagnons Bruges' previously mentioned approach of asking some newcomers to wait one or two additional months to improve their language skills before reapplying.

How to reject a candidate

The coordinator of Samen Gentenaar explains how they deal with candidates who have incorrect and/or too many expectations: "I think at that point it's super important to deliver the message why someone can't participate in an honest but human way. Because someone has the courage to take the step to want to participate and then they are not even allowed, that's terrible right? As long as I keep realising what impact that has on the person, I think I'll be able to get the message across. And indeed, start looking for alternatives [...] and refer them to the right person and figure out how they got to me. If that is via a social worker, for example, we'll have a talk with them."

3.2.2.2 Selection procedure

To screen mentee candidates, programs can make use of a number of screening methods. The table below summarizes their most common options.

Table 6 Mentee selection methods

(Online) intake form
Face-to-face intake interview
Intake by phone or video call
Group info session

An (online) intake form is, again, the most common screening and selection method used by social mentoring programs for newcomers.

Intake forms: some examples

Almost every mentoring program we interviewed for this report uses an intake form to screen and select their mentee candidates. For practical examples, please consult the intake forms used by Compagnons, Budd'Iz (Izegem), and Leuven municipality.

What to include on an intake form

While there is some differentiation among intake forms, they typically include questions about:

- ✓ *Personal details: name, gender, contact information, age, marital status, and children*
- ✓ *Details of the referrer: name, connection, contact information*
- ✓ *Language skills*
- ✓ *Education and profession*
- ✓ *Current living situation (housing, employment, education, social contacts etc.)*
- ✓ *Hobbies and interests*
- ✓ *Motivation*
- ✓ *Availability*
- ✓ *Needs/expectations (type of mentoring/assistance/activities)*
- ✓ *Preferences (e.g., gender of mentor)*

Intake forms are usually combined with a second screening method. Similar to the mentor screening process, this typically involves a one-on-one interview though COVID-19 forced most programs to seek alternative methods such as video call intakes. While individual intake interviews are common, they are less common for mentee screening than for mentor screening. The social mentoring program organised by the municipality of Leuven, for example, does not meet their mentees until the first meeting with the mentor and mentee. They base their screening, selection and even matching solely on the information they obtain via the intake form and any additional information from a referrer.

An alternative method that similarly alleviates some of the time and resource constraints that many social mentoring programs struggle with is a group information session. While such sessions provide an opportunity to inform candidates about the program, they are usually accompanied by individual intake forms or interviews in order to obtain the personal information that is needed to screen and select each individual candidate.

An example from practice

Once Samen Gentenaar has enough candidates on their waiting list, they schedule an information and intake session. Mentor and mentee candidates attend the same session. The session is structured as follows:

- *Welcome (with snack and drink)*
- *General information (vision and mission of IN-Gent, objectives, and structure of Samen Gentenaar, criteria for participation)*
- *Group discussion about motivation and expectations*
- *Individual intake: intake forms are completed with the help of a member of staff*

One of the main challenges at this stage of the mentoring process is adequately informing the mentee about the purpose of the program and the role of the mentor. Setting expectations of what to expect – and importantly, what *not* to expect – is a crucial part of the first meeting, whether that is in person, via video call, or during a group information session. Coordinators suggest keeping the information as short and concise as possible. They usually explain the program and the role of the mentor with a few keywords and contradictions that are easy to understand, even if the mentee has a limited understanding of the language. One program explains it to mentees as follows:

A mentor is	**A mentor is not**
A friend, a sympathetic ear	A private tutor
Someone to do activities with	A romantic partner
Someone to practice Dutch with	A social assistant

To ensure that newcomers understand what they are signing up for by becoming a volunteer, several programs use visual tools and translated materials.

Example from practice

The coordinator of Tandem uses a variety of tools to communicate with mentee candidates during their intake. To ensure that candidates have the right expectations and understanding of the program, the coordinator may use Google Translate, hand gestures, a PowerPoint presentation or other visuals to explain common activities that mentors and mentees can do together e.g., by showing photos of people shopping, doing groceries, at the playground etc. The introductory videos on the website of the project are another useful tool and are available in multiple languages.

3.3 Recommendations

- ✓ Programs should have clear participation criteria that align with the objectives of the program. Some of the most common criteria that programs use, and we recommend are:
    - For mentors: expectations, personality, motivation, age, language skills, place of residence, and availability and ability to commit to the program.
    - For mentees: language skills, age, place of residence, immigration status, motivation, expectations, availability, and ability to commit to the program, and absence of more immediate needs that require professional assistance.
- ✓ Programs should schedule one-on-one intake interviews with potential candidates and document their information on a standardized intake form.
- ✓ Programs should ensure that candidates are properly informed about the program during the screening and selection phase. This includes setting the right expectations and explaining their role in a mentoring relationship, the steps and goals of a mentoring relationship and the program, and the assistance they can expect from the organisation. This can be done during the one-on-one intakes or during information sessions in group-format.
- ✓ If programs organise group info sessions, they should require candidates to attend one session before they can join a mentoring relationship.
- ✓ If programs opt for group info sessions, they should invite former or current mentors to the sessions to share their experiences and answer questions.
- ✓ When informing candidates, programs should make sure the information is easy to understand, available in multiple languages or easy to translate, and supported by visual tools.
- ✓ Programs should refer ineligible candidates to other volunteer programs or services.

4| Matching

A good match is often considered the number one factor that can determine and explain the effectiveness of mentoring. We can distinguish two crucial elements of matching: the matching criteria and the matching procedure or method of matching. We first discuss extant research on the topic, after which we will discuss the two elements of matching (criteria and procedure) successively. We conclude with a list of recommendations.

4.1 According to the literature

Matching mentors and mentees is one of the most important steps within the mentoring process to ensure a successful mentor-mentee relationship and an effective outcome (Van 't Hoog et al., 2012; Allen et al., 2009; Uyterlinde et al., 2009). While a good match can result in a successful mentoring relationship and positive outcomes, a mismatch can significantly lessen the benefits of mentoring or even do harm with participants reporting stress and intentions to terminate the mentoring relationship (Eby & Allen, 2002). One of the most important questions for mentoring programs is thus which matching criteria contribute to a successful mentoring relationship. Studies on matching for newcomers are however still limited.

Extant literature offers some insights into the best matching criteria though results are mostly limited to youth mentoring, student mentoring, and mentoring at work. Matching criteria that have been discussed extensively are sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, age, race, and ethnicity. Yet, conclusions on their effectiveness as matching criteria differ. While some research has shown that sociodemographic similarities such as ethnicity, race, and gender contribute to longer and more successful mentoring relationships (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; McKeen & Bujaki, 2007; Raposa et al., 2019), other research finds no correlation (Eby et al., 2013) or only for some sociodemographic characteristics and mentoring outcomes (Blake-Beard et al., 2011; Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Lankau et al., 2005; Neuwirth & Wahl, 2017).

In addition to sociodemographic characteristics, research on matching criteria has also focused on so-called 'deep-level' characteristics such as personality, interests, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Eby et al., 2013; Madia & Lutz, 2004; Menges, 2016). In comparison with more surface-level characteristics such as gender and race, deep-level similarities demonstrate stronger positive effects on the mentoring relationship. Deep-level similarities (or perceptions thereof) have been found to positively influence perceptions of support and the relationship quality (Eby et al., 2013; Menges, 2016), program satisfaction and effectiveness of the program (Neuwirth & Wahl, 2017), and mentor's intention to remain in the mentoring relationship (Madia & Lutz, 2004). Research by Neuwirth and Wahl (2017) for example in which they studied the impact of an Austrian mentoring-to-work program for migrants, found no relation between objective similarity in the sociodemographic background (sex, age, country of birth and vocational background) of mentors and mentees. Perceptions of subjective similarity did result in better evaluations of the program. Career functions, psychosocial functions, program satisfaction, quality of the training, and effectiveness of the program were all evaluated more positively the more similar mentees perceived themselves to their mentors.

Similarly, research by Eby et al. (2013) shows that surface-level similarity (gender, race) is not associated with mentees' perceptions of instrumental and psychosocial support or relationship quality whereas deep-level similarity (attitudes, beliefs, values, personality) has a strong positive influence on such perceptions, especially in terms of psychosocial support and relationship quality. Menges (2016, 116-8) assessed the impact of personality similarities on received mentoring support and found that similarities in openness to experience – "intellectual curiosity, creativity, imagination, open-mindedness, and attentiveness to emotions" - and conscientiousness – "a

tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and be organized, task-focused and persistent" - improved the psychosocial support mentees received. Similarities in extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism had no effect.

Some research has also tried to determine the importance of practical considerations such as geographical location and time availability to the mentoring relationship. According to Eby et al. (2013), interaction frequency strongly correlates with mentees' perceptions of relationship quality, especially in terms of psychosocial support. Other studies have further confirmed the importance of considering geographical location and time availability during the matching process (Eby & Lockwood, 2005) with Cox (2005) even arguing that, through the careful selection and training of mentors, matching is only necessary in terms of participants' geographical location and time availability.

Research on the matching process or method is underdeveloped. In terms of the general approach to matching, Blake-Beard et al. (2007) have identified three common options: administrator-assigned matching (program coordinators match mentors and mentees based on their own criteria and assessment, with no input from participants), choice-based matching (mentors and mentees choose, either through one-sided or mutual selection), and assessment-based matching (mentors and mentees are matched with the help of assessment tools).

The involvement of mentors and mentees in the matching process is a recurring topic of discussion. Blake-Beard et al. (2007) observed substantial differences between matches in which some choice was allowed compared to those determined by the program coordinator. Benefits of allowing some input from mentors and mentees include greater commitment to the relationship, more willingness to spend time together, greater ability to work through conflict, greater access to mentoring partners, and increased interest in maintaining the relationship after the formal conclusion of the mentoring program. Allen et al. (2006) found that mentors' and mentees' input in the matching process positively influence the perceived program effectiveness, mentor commitment, and program understanding. The positive influence of including participants in the matching process is also emphasized by Drew et al. (2020) who found that mentors who believe their preferences were considered during the matching process, were less likely to feel that they would be better matched with someone else and were therefore more committed to maintaining their current mentoring relationship. The importance of soliciting input from mentees and mentors in the matching process has been further substantiated by Menges (2016), Op de Beeck and De Cuyper (2022), and Wanberg et al. (2003).

4.2 In practice

4.2.1 Matching criteria

While most of the literature on matching criteria focuses on mentoring at work programs or youth mentoring, social mentoring programs for newcomers often adopt similar criteria. The table below lists the most common matching criteria used by such programs.

Table 7 Matching criteria

Mentee's needs/goals/expectations
Mentor's offer and expectations
Mentor's skills and professional background
Mentor's knowledge
Interests and hobbies
Language skills
Availability and time commitment
Geographical location
Age
Gender
Family
Attitudes/preferences
Personality

Some of, if not the most important matching criteria identified by program coordinators are the needs, goals, and expectations of the mentee. In the context of social mentoring for newcomers, these might be learning the language, getting to know the city, expanding their social network, receiving administrative and practical assistance (e.g., help with official documents, access to services, finding housing etc.), or enjoying leisure time. Coordinators recommend spending adequate time mapping out a mentee's needs, goals, and expectations to ensure the best possible match.

Matching by needs

"When the Public Centre for Social Welfare has a client who is new to the city and needs a mentor, we look at it together: what are the needs and how can we best meet them?" (Coordinator Budd'Iz)

An example from practice

"During the intake, I already check, for example if it is about leisure time, if there are children, what would they like to do? And I check whether there is a link with a mentor and whether they can play a role in this. For example, we have a play-and-meeting space in the city for children up to four years old and the parents can go there but for many asylum seekers and refugees, there is a barrier to go there, and the mentor can then for example go along with them." (Halle)

An example from practice

To get a clear picture of a candidate's needs, goals, and expectations, Compagnons Oostende has included the following question and options on their intake form:

Why do you want to participate in Compagnons?

- *I want to meet new people*
- *I want to speak Dutch more often*
- *I would like to get to know the city better*
- *I want to do more in my spare time*
- *Other*

To do so, they rely on information obtained during the screening and selection phase. Additionally, some coordinators will consult a mentee's referrer to gain an even better understanding of their individual needs. Having a good understanding of such needs can help programs in their assistance of the mentor, who can be informed of the needs of the mentee before the mentoring relationship and can, if necessary, be given concrete tools such as relevant training sessions.

To match the mentee based on their needs, goals and expectations, coordinators also consider the mentor's offer i.e., what the mentor is willing to do and/or help with, and their expectations of the program and mentoring relationship. Most mentoring programs suggest different mentoring options or ask mentors what they would (not) like to help the mentee with during the screening and selection phase.

Matching by mentor expectations

Budd'Iz differentiates between different types of mentors:

1. *Welcome mentor*
2. *Housing mentor*
3. *General mentor*
4. *Language mentor*
5. *Leisure mentor:*
6. *Other*

During their intake, mentees can indicate what type of mentor they are looking for while mentors can select the type of mentor they would like to be. Based on these answers, the coordinator makes a first selection of possible matches.

Programs that do not make such a clear distinction between different types of mentoring still try to take the needs, expectations and offer into consideration though the importance of these matching criteria also depends on how clearly defined the needs of the mentee and offer of the mentor are. If a mentee's needs are very specific, for example if they need assistance with looking for housing, ensuring a good fit between the needs of the mentee and the offer of the mentor is necessary to avoid conflict, loss of interest, and dissatisfaction with the mentoring program. If a mentee's needs are so general that they can be matched with almost any mentor, other matching criteria become more important. The importance of this matching criteria is thus dependent on the specificity with which participants define their needs, expectations, and offer.

General vs. specific matches

"Very simply put, we have two groups of people, either it's super specific or it's people I can match wit anyone, 'I like to hike, I like to bike, I like to go to the museum, I like to go for a drink.' To me, those are pretty much the 'all-rounders'. Those are easy to match. I also really like it when you find a very specific match. Right now, a buddy and a long-term resident who both like to climb are participating in the program. So that immediately took off. I already got a message today that they're going climbing in the Ardennes this Saturday."

In addition to the mentor's offer and expectations, every program considers the skills and professional background of the mentor. While social mentoring programs for newcomers are not meant to facilitate the labor market integration of newcomers, certain skills or professional backgrounds could still be beneficial to the mentoring relationship. One mentor's background in special needs education, for example, made it easier for her to communicate with mentees with a very limited or no understanding of the local language. While the mentor's skills/professional background and knowledge are often grouped together in the academic literature, knowledge unrelated to one's profession could prove very useful in the context of social mentoring. Some mentors may know a lot about the local housing market or schools and children's services (because they themselves have children of the same age, for example) or local sports facilities, or clubs and associations. Such knowledge, while not professional in nature, is worth considering when matching mentors and mentees.

In the coordinator's pursuit of a good match, deep-level factors such as interests and hobbies can often be decisive. Every social mentoring program takes interests and hobbies into consideration. Mentors and mentees with similar interests and hobbies are expected to connect more easily than those who do not share interests and hobbies. In case the mentor and mentee cannot talk at length (yet) due to language restrictions, having a hobby such as biking or painting in common can facilitate the relationship and allow for informal language learning while being active or engaged in something else.

Matching by hobbies and interests

A few years ago, the coordinator of the mentoring program in Halle matched a newcomer couple who are both painters with a mentor who is "super artistically inclined and an art restorer professionally." According to the coordinator, "a mentor like that is the best because you have a common interest." The mentor and mentees are still in touch to this day.

Matching by hobbies and interests

The coordinator of Compagnons Bruges found a match "and thought it was such a beautiful match because they both like to read, both like to be in nature, one is a writer, likes going to the theatre and the other performs in the theatre, and both are the same age. So, I thought 'that's a perfect match.' They are most likely going to read books and then talk about them together during their walks."

Most programs take the language skills of mentor and mentee into consideration when matching. For mentoring to be effective, mentor and mentee need to be able to communicate with each other. While some programs expect duos to communicate in the local language to facilitate the mentee's language learning, mentees are often only at a basic level of understanding when they start their mentoring relationship. Some programs will thus prioritize relationship building and allow for matching based on other languages participants have in common such as English or French. If programs prioritize language learning, matching based on another common language may be disadvantageous since mentees may not develop their local language skills if they can easily communicate with their mentor in another language. The importance programs assign to this criterion is thus dependent on the goals of the program, though almost all social mentoring programs do take it into consideration.

Almost all programs also consider participants' availability and time commitment in the matching process. etings are necessary for a succesful mentoring relationship. Some mentees will also require more assistance than other. To ensure that they receive the assistance they need, and the mentor does not become overwhelmed, it is useful to know when both participants are available and how much of their time they want to commit to the program.

Matching by availability

To illustrate, Compagnons' intake forms include the following questions related to availability and time commitment:

- *When can you (usually) make time?*
  During the day/in the evening/weekend/during the week/no preference
- *How much time can you/do you want to spend on mentoring?*
- *Are there periods when you are less available?*

While this can be difficult for participants to indicate ahead of time, programs typically try to avoid matching mentors with very busy lives who only have time to meet once a week for two hours with mentees who require a lot of support and assistance. Matching participants with conflicting agendas and expectations in terms of commitment will most likely result in an unfulfilling mentoring relationship or even conflict. Mentees who require more assistance are thus often matched with retirees or people working parttime jobs.

A few programs also take the geographical location of mentors and mentees into consideration during the matching procedure. Geographical proximity is conducive to more frequent interactions which in turn helps

foster a better relationship. Living far away from each other will not only be difficult in terms of travel time and transportation but will also impact the extent to which the mentor can help the mentee. If the mentor is not familiar with the locality where the mentee lives, they might not be able to guide them to relevant services, clubs and associations, leisure activities, schools et cetera.

The relevance of this criteria depends on several factors. Since some programs already exclude participants who live in a different city or municipality during the recruitment and selection phase, it might be unnecessary to consider geographical location during matching. The need for this criterion also depends on the size of the city in which the program operates. If the mentoring program is active in a small municipality and only accepts participants from that municipality, location will most likely be an unnecessary criterion to consider at the matching stage. If the program is available to participants from a multitude of municipalities or is in a large city, matching based on location could be more relevant.

While location is usually considered to avoid matching people who live too far away from each other, one coordinator argued that the reverse could also be relevant. Matching two people who live very close, for example in the same street, might be unwelcome. Participants might want to avoid unannounced house calls and keep some distance between their mentoring relationship and their private life. However, another program accidently matched two people who lived next to each other without problems. To safeguard participants' personal boundaries, programs can ask for participants' approval before matching.

Matching neighbours

When the coordinator of Samen Gentenaar matched A and J, she did not know they lived right next door to each other, and neither did they. While their match was based on common interests, their proximity contributed to the development of their relationship. Their story was captured for 'Day of the Neighbours'.

Other common criteria that most programs consider are age, gender, and family situation.

Matching by age

The coordinator of the social mentoring program in Halle matched two young newcomers with a young mentor in the assumption that this similarity in age would benefit their mentoring relationship. More practically, a young mentor was expected to be able to answer to their particular needs such as arranging subscriptions for internet and phones better than an older mentor who may be less familiar with such matters.

Matching based on gender can be difficult with many programs having a large pool of male newcomers and female volunteers. In some cases, programs might still try to refrain from matching people of different genders. After matches between Afghan male mentees and female mentors failed due to the mentees' traditional gender customs, including restrictions on male-female interactions, several programs became more hesitant to match men from Afghanistan with female mentors. The coordinator of a mentoring program that also caters to underage mentees will usually avoid matching a young female mentee with a single male mentor but if the mentor has a family who will also be involved in the mentoring, they might be considered a possible match. In general, coordinators seem to prefer matching people of the same gender though such decisions are often based on assumptions and the previously mentioned 'gut feeling'.

While there is no mention of matching based on candidates' 'family situation' in the literature, almost all programs adopt it as a criterion, especially if a mentee has children. The expectation is that a mentor who also has children will be better able to assist with tutoring, communication with the school, arranging childcare support or other services, or figuring out local arrangements for afterschool care and children's activities, while also providing opportunities for the mentee's children to meet more native speakers and other children.

Matching by family situation

"In the intake we do ask about age and whether they have a family and about hobbies, both with the mentor and with the newcomer, to see if there is a link. For example, I had a conversation about two months ago with a newcomer family with two children, a boy, and a girl of 7 and 10. And right after that I met someone, a teacher in secondary education, who was of exactly the same age as the couple and who also had three children with the two youngest being about the same age as their two children. […] So, the first meeting went smoothly, and they immediately agreed to meet up a few times to take the children on a walk so they could play together in the park. So those are the things you look for, but is that the perfect match? I'll have to see when I call in a month whether that worked out well or not" (Samen Thuis in Hasselt).

While some programs use their own judgment when applying criteria such as age, gender, and family, they usually base their matching decisions on participants' preferences. Even though it is not always possible to take every preference into consideration due to a limited pool of available mentors and mentees, coordinators do attempt to comply with explicitly mentioned preferences. Some mentees may indicate that they do not want to be matched with someone of a different gender or someone too different or similar in age. Mentees with children may prefer to have a mentor with children so the children can also make friends and interact with more native speakers. It is, however, always important to gauge *why* someone has a certain preference. As explicitly mentioned by several coordinators, social mentoring programs are not dating services and people, for example, deliberately asking for mentees or mentors of the opposite gender for no apparent reason should raise questions.

Coordinators will usually try to ascertain participants' attitudes and preferences during the intake. If there are indications that there are cultural, religious, or personal reasons why someone would not want to be matched with someone of a different gender, age, or sexuality, coordinators will take this into account during matching. Though this information is never asked directly or via intake forms, the coordinator can take it into consideration if it comes up in conversation. For example, if one of the programs realizes a mentee is very conservative, they might refrain from matching them with a mentor who they know identifies as LGBTQ+.

Even though coordinators often struggle to define the relevance of participants' personality to the matching decision, some of them do mention it as a criterion though their understanding and application of the criterion remains somewhat superficial. Programs that take personality into account will often do so by matching quiet mentees with more open, extroverted mentors to avoid a lack of communication or initiative.

Matching by personality

The coordinator of Fedasil Kapellen tells us the following: "what I take into account for example is: how does that person come across? Is it someone very easy-going? Very sociable? Yes, then we can place them with a more timid person. But if it's someone who does not ask a lot of questions or talk, we will try to place them with a more talkative person."

While matching criteria are used by every mentoring program, the importance of coordinators' 'gut feeling' should not be underestimated. Almost every coordinator either explicitly mentioned this gut feeling or referred to their professional experience, arguing they sometimes simply 'felt' or 'knew' that two people would make a good match. A coordinator might meet a mentee during their intake and immediately know who they want to match them with, without properly considering all the matching criteria officially used by the program. This gut feeling is difficult if not impossible to capture by matching criteria and no matter how many criteria programs adopt, a coordinator's experience and gut feeling will likely continue to play an important role in matching.

Even if matches are based on matching criteria and/or the coordinator's gut feeling, there is no guarantee that they will work in practice. Many coordinators stress that it is sometimes impossible to know why one match works and another fails. A successful mentoring relationship is in part determined by the 'connection' between mentor and mentee. While matching criteria and the coordinator's gut feeling can attempt to account for all the different characteristics and circumstances that might make two people connect, fully understanding why some people get along and others do not is next to impossible.

4.2.2 Matching procedure

While the academic literature on mentoring identifies several approaches to matching, social mentoring programs adopt roughly the same matching procedure: administrator-assigned matching, in which the matching is done by the program coordinator. Since most social mentoring programs are small-scale programs with a limited pool of mentors and mentees, matching is usually not an elaborate and structured process. Due to the small number of possible candidates, coordinators cannot use all the matching criteria available to them to match each mentor and mentee. Even the ability to match candidates on multiple criteria is usually limited.

Instead, participants might be matched because they have a common interest such as climbing, or because they both have children, or because the mentee prefers to be matched with a man and there is only one male mentor available. In practice, matching is often as simple as that. Being able to take multiple criteria into consideration for each match is a luxury that many small social mentoring programs simply do not have.

An example from practice

The coordinator of Samen Gentenaar, one of the larger social mentoring programs included in our research, used to do the matching of mentors and mentees in an Excel file but recently used to a more visual and hands-on approach in addition to the Excel file. They now create a small card for each candidate with some of their key information such as age, language skills, preferences, and interests. By using physical cards, they can quickly get a sense of a new group of candidates and arrange and rearrange them to find the best matches. Even just the act of making the cards, seeing them in front of you, and moving them around can help to memorise candidates and find connections.

For most coordinators, even this simple approach is often more elaborate than necessary. Sometimes, a coordinator will do an intake interview with a mentee and immediately know which mentor to match them with. This could be because they recognize a common interest or a need that they know one of their mentors can help with. If the choice is less obvious, there might be a few possible candidates to choose from but even then, coordinators might easily exclude some because of conflicting time schedules or mentors' unwillingness to offer specific assistance that the mentee needs, such as help finding housing. With a limited pool of options, there is often hardly any matching 'process' to speak of.

An alternative to administrator-assigned matching that some coordinators expressed interest in is the speeddating approach. This matching procedure is more common among mentoring-to-work programs and involves a speeddating event in which mentors and mentees can meet each other. Afterwards, they are asked to provide a list of preferences, which the program then consults to find the right match. One mentoring-to-work program that uses this matching strategy does influence the speeddating event somewhat by deciding who will 'date' who based on several criteria such as level of eduation and location. While some social mentoring program coordinators had considered a speeddating approach, none had implemented it.

"Speeddating" as an option?

When Compagnons Oostende updated their entire mentoring program in 2020, they initially set out to introduce a speeddating approach to matching. However, after considering it some more, they decided to stick by their tried and tested approach of administrator-assigned matching. Why? To organize speeddates, it would have been necessary to have a sufficiently large group of mentors and mentees ready for matching at the same time. In reality, candidates apply and enter the program throughout the year, and some would have to wait for months until a speeddating matching event.

The matching approach in Leuven

Leuven, one of the larger social mentoring programs for newcomers in Flanders, did try a somewhat similar, though one-sided, matching approach before COVID-19 restrictions forced them to abandon the approach, for now. During an info session for mentors, they used two walls, one to (anonymously) display information about single mentees and the other to display information about mentee families. Mentors could read the information and indicate their preferred matches on their intake form. By using this approach, they did not only involve the mentor in the matching process but also alleviated the coordinator of some of the work involved in matching. In the future, the program coordinators would like to involve the mentee more in the matching process as well.

While almost none of the other mentoring programs allow such direct involvement of the candidates in the matching process, they usually do allow some input though the extent of this input differs from program to program. The preferences that participants can usually indicate during the screening and selection phase already give them some influence over the matching process. Once the coordinator has found a match, they will contact the participants via phone or email to invite them to their first meeting. Some programs will first contact the mentor to share some information about their potential mentee. At this time, the mentor can give their input and can choose to accept or decline the match. If the mentor accepts, they or the coordinator will contact the mentee to schedule a first meeting. Mentees are usually not asked for input before the first meeting.

An example from practice

Once the program in Leuven has found a match, they do the following:

"We send a long mail to the mentor, only to the mentor and the referrer of the newcomer, with all the information of the newcomer so: who is the newcomer, what does he do, what did he do in his home country, which languages does he speak, what level of Dutch does he have, what support would he like, who are his friends, does he have a large network, is he socially isolated, what is his financial situation? So, we put all the necessary information in the mail. […] And ask, 'does this seem like a possible match to you?' They may say no, they may say yes. If yes, they may continue with the contact and the next steps that I then explain in the email. If no, they can still ask for another match. And then we also put in a sentence that they may use when they contact the newcomer so: who am I, from whom did I get your contact information? […] when are you available, can we go to the coordinator at that time? […] And then they can contact us, and in that first mail, I also give the times that I am available in my schedule, that week, or the week after. They can make an appointment together […] and then they usually visit me at the office, and we move on to the official matching.

An example from practice

Alternatively, Samen Gentenaar does not give their mentors and mentees time to accept or deny a match before the first meeting between the duo. Instead, the coordinator invites them to a collective event where they will meet for the first time and find out who they are matched with. According to the coordinator, even if given the option, participants will usually not decline a match prior to this and if they do, it would most likely be for the wrong reasons, for example due to assumptions and prejudgments. It is important that their participants instead trust the matchmaker and (are willing to) allow their mentoring relationship to grow.

Regardless of the matching approach, most coordinators stress the importance of matching within a few weeks after the intake. If there is no possible match at the time of application, coordinators may allow some waiting time, but they do not suggest waiting for the 'perfect match'. Matches that seem perfect on paper often do not work out, and vice versa. Rather than having participants wait for a match for months, which often leads to frustration and a loss of interest, most programs try to find the best match with the pool of candidates that are available at that time. If a candidate has specific preferences, for example concerning gender, and there no candidates that fit those preferences, programs often propose an alternative match which the candidate can accept or refuse if they would rather wait for someone who matches their preferences. This is the only instance that we found in which a mentee might be given input in the matching decision before the first meeting with their

mentor.

Example from practice

"What I do now is match faster. I used to wait until the perfect match, but I don't do that anymore. When people come to us for an intake interview, I want them to be helped as quickly as possible, but only if I have a good feeling about it." (Samen Thuis in Hasselt)

4.2.3 Rematching

Once participants are matched, they might still choose to reject the match after the first meeting or terminate the relationship after some time. If one or both participants want to terminate their mentoring relationship, the coordinator will usually schedule a meeting or speak to them over the phone to discuss the termination. Unless there is a reason to exclude participants from the program based on their behavior during their terminated relationship, programs will typically attempt to recuperate candidates. Participants have usually been informed about a rematch option during recruitment and/or screening and selection. Those that realise early in the mentoring relationship that they lack a connection, or it is not going to work out for other reasons usually want to be rematched. Those that terminate their relationship due to conflict might not. According to one of the coordinators, a negative experience can be very decisive and make the participants not only want to quite the mentoring relationship but their association with the program in general. Depending on the structure of the program, participants who want to be rematched will either be 1) rematched immediately or as soon as there is a new match available, or 2) matched when the next official mentoring period starts.

4.3 Recommendations

- ✓ Programs should use matching criteria that align with their objectives. Common criteria include: 1) the mentee's needs, goals, and expectations, 2) the mentor's offer and expectations, 3) the mentor's skills and professional background, 4) the mentor's general knowledge, 5) interests and hobbies, 6) language skills, 7) availability and time commitment, 8) geographical location, 9) age, 10) gender, 11) family, 12) attitudes and preferences, and 13) personality.
- ✓ Programs should decide which criteria are most important for their program and/or each candidate and prioritise those when it is not possible to use all criteria.
- ✓ Programs should ask participants about their matching preferences and take them into consideration as much as possible.
- ✓ Programs should allow the program coordinator or other staff member to do the matching between mentors and mentees. Options include administrator-assigned matching or a speeddating approach in which participants can communicate several preferences, but the coordinator decides the final match.
- ✓ Programs should try to match candidates within a few weeks after their intake, but preferably as soon as possible to avoid losing potential participants.
- ✓ Programs should inform candidates if there is no (immediate) match available and let them decide if they would like to accept an alternative match that does not entirely fit their preferences or wait for a better match.
- ✓ Once candidates have been matched, programs should invite them for a first meeting together with the coordinator.
- ✓ Programs should offer a rematch if a mentoring relationship ends prematurely unless the reason for termination is cause for excluding someone from the mentoring program entirely.

5 | The mentoring relationship & closure

In the previous chapters, we discussed the process leading up to a mentoring relationship. In this chapter, we will discuss what such a relationship actually entails including elements such as the start, duration and frequency, the activities that mentors and mentees do together, and the factors that make or break a relationship such as trust and reciprocity. After discussing extant literature on such topics and our findings from practice, we conclude with a set of recommendations to get the most out of a mentoring relationship.

5.1 According to the literature

Two of the constituting elements of any successful mentoring relationship are its duration and intensity (i.e., contact frequency).

Generally speaking, longer-term relationships are found to have more benefits for mentees than shorter-term relationships (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Uyterlinde et al., 2009). Eby et al. (2013) found that mentees in longer relationships perceived greater psychosocial support and relationship quality though relationship duration was less strongly associated with instrumental support. According to Grossman and Rhodes (2002), the impact of mentoring increases as the relationship develops. In their research on the effects of duration in youth mentoring relationships, they found that youth who were in relationships that lasted a year or longer reported significant improvements in academic, psychosocial, and behavioral outcomes. Effects were progressively fewer the shorter a relationship lasted.

Van der Tier and Potting (2015) even argue that a mentoring relationship of less than a year will show little to no effects. According to Griffiths et al. (2009), shorter mentoring durations may not allow enough time for the development of the relationship and trust between the duo. This can affect the extent to which the mentee benefits from long-lasting effects associated with mentoring, such as increased confidence, self-esteem, and awareness of and access to support services. Nevertheless, programs with more targeted and limited goals have been able to achieve significant results with relationships of a shorter duration (MENTOR, 2015).

Perhaps even more important than a relationship's duration is the frequency of contact between its members. Frequent and meaningful interactions are a recognized characteristic of high-quality relationships (Kram, 1985). According to Eby et al. (2013), interaction frequency is associated with mentees' perceptions of instrumental support, psychosocial support and relationship quality. In their evaluation of a co-housing mentoring program in Antwerp, Mahieu et al. (2019) found that the amount of contact between duos had a significant effect on (perceived) integration outcomes such as overall Dutch language skills, frequency of usage of Dutch, institutional knowledge of Flanders/Belgium, and understanding of Flemish/Belgian habits. The authors suggest that mentees who had more contact with their mentor gained more skills and knowledge that could facilitate their participation in Belgian society. The importance of regular and frequent contact between mentor and mentee is further emphasized by Bagnoli and Estache (2019), Bayer et al. (2015), Haggard et al. (2011), Lankau et al. (2005), and Menges (2016).

In their research on youth mentoring, Keller et al. (2020) found that more favorable mentoring outcomes were achieved when participants balanced relationally oriented activities with goal-oriented, instrumental activities. Programs can support their duos by, for example, providing a list with activity suggestions, which is associated with longer average relationship durations and better match retention (MENTOR, 2015). According to Miller (2007), programs that provide monthly acitivity calendars, offer tickets to events, and/or offer opportunities to

participate in structured events usually have better outcomes.

Successful, long-term mentoring relationships are characterized by trust, authenticity, empathy, collaboration, and companionship (Lester et al., 2019; MENTOR, 2015; Spencer, 2006). Relationships that are perceived as such by mentees result in better outcomes than other relationships. To sustain the relationship, both parties need to be invested and committed to the match (Rhodes, 2002, Spencer et al., 2020). Karcher et al. (2010) found that the quality of a mentoring relationship is significantly higher in mentor-mentee duos that make decisions collaboratively rather than unilaterally.

It is this mutuality that is thought to contribute to a close, interpersonal bond. Lester et al. (2019) found that mentors and mentees in youth mentoring programs understand mutuality as 1) shared relational excitement, or a willingness by both participants to invest in the relationship and 2) experiential empathy, or the process through which mentors connect with, advise, and normalize the experiences of their mentees by sharing their own experiences. The interpersonal connection that develops because of such mutuality can, in turn, contribute to positive mentoring outcomes.

To provide closure at the end of the mentoring relationship, it is recommended that programs communicate closure policies and procedures to both parties over the course the relationship (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). Early termination can have negative consequences for the mentee, especially if the relationship ends abruptly or due to conflict (Rhodes, 2002). Even if the relationship lasts its ended duration, a formal closure procedure is necessary to alllow each party to the mentoring relationship an opportunity to reflect on and process the relationship, discuss its impact, offer suggestions for program improvement, and to prevent negative emotional outcomes (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014; Spencer et al., 2014).

5.2 In practice

5.2.1 The start, duration, frequency

5.2.1.1 The first meeting

Relevance of the first meeting

"That first introductory meeting is incredibly important to create trust for both and to see them step outside, almost hand-in-hand." (Leuven)

Once the match has been finalised and the mentor and mentee have agreed to meet, programs will schedule a first meeting. Some coordinators are present during this meeting while others choose to stay only for a while to get the conversation going and then leave opportunity for the mentor and mentee to get to know each other by themselves. Some programs also involve the social worker in the meeting, especially if they referred the mentee to the mentoring program. If another professional referred the mentee to the program, they might be asked to attend as well, though involving social workers or (other) referrers in the first meeting is difficult in terms of scheduling so it tends to be more exception than rule.

The first meeting is an opportunity for the mentor and mentee to get to know each other and get their mentoring relationship off the ground but it is also an occassion for the coordinator to reiterate or further inform them about the program, expectations, and other important information. Coordinators usually explain why they matched the mentor and mentee during this meeting. They may refer to a common interest or a specific need of the mentee that the mentor will be able to help with. Once again delineating what the role of the mentor

An example from practice

"I first start with 'do you know why you're here today?' I start with that and then they say 'yes, yes, yes'. I say: 'but can you explain to me in your own words: what is a buddy?' And then that stops and it's like 'hmm… someone who helps?' [Laughs]. So, then the ice is broken and then I go on maybe in their own language, use a lot of words from their own language, usually I also speak a little bit of Arabic. And I also pass along five things with my fingers. I always say [using fingers to indicate each point]: a buddy is 1) someone who is a volunteer, who works for free. That's very important to mention that. Some think they really work for me, they say 'they work for [name coordinator], for the city so they are paid to help me', while that is not the case at all. 2) A buddy has a family and friends. 3) A buddy also works. 4) A buddy also has a hobby. So, they do all kinds of things. And then I say: 5) they have a little bit of time every week to help someone, they have a good heart, don't they? And then they really laugh like 'wow, this person has so many things and yet they have some time for me'. So, what does that mean? That that appointment is very important to that person because of all those other things. That they also include you, they also give you an hour or two a week to learn Dutch, to create a friendship with you, to go on walks with you, to cycle with you … […] You really need to have this feeling of: this person is going to walk out of here and they will know: this is a person who is going to help me." (Leuven)

is – and specifically what it is not – is also an important part of this first meeting. Both participants should leave knowing exactly what is expected of them and when they should ask for help from the coordinator or request a referral to professional assistance. For programs who do not interview mentors and/or mentees individually before the first meeting, this is especially important but even those who have already had individual interviews often use this meeting to repeat the key information one more time before the mentoring begins.

Coordinators stress the importance of scheduling the next meeting between the mentor and mentee during this first meeting. If this is not done immediately, participants might never schedule another meeting, whether due to fear on the part of the mentee or for other reasons. But if you sit them down together and decide then and there 'next week on Wednesday 2 o'clock you will meet each other in this park…', it works much better.

Some programs give the mentor and mentee opportunity to consider the match based on the first meeting and get back to them to let the coordinator know whether they want to move forward with the mentoring relationship. In practice, participants usually agree on the spot that they want to start their mentoring relationship together. This, of course, leaves little opportunity to refuse the matching as this would require rejecting someone to their face but according to coordinators, participants hardly ever reject the other person this early on the relationship.

According to one coordinator, participants should not even be given opportunity to refuse the match. The program has a unique first meeting in which not only the matched mentor and mentee are brought together but all mentors and mentees are invited. Everyone is introduced to each other, after which they receive some identifying image such as an animal and then they have to find their match in the crowd asking others 'hey, I am a horse, do you know if there are any other horses?' Such a collective and participatory first event can contribute to a sense of community among participants and more engagement later on during the mentoring period, for example in terms of participation in group activities or peer learning. It does not, however, leave much room to decline the match, a deliberate choice that the coordinator justifies as follows

An example from practice

"This is not about friendship for me. Does it become friendship? Then that's great, but I can't guarantee that. I think people have to step into it with a kind of trust that something can grow out of it, but I can't accept that someone says at first glance: no this isn't it. And if you give someone a reflection period of 5 days, what are you going to think about? About what someone looks like? I don't want to go along with that. Just let it grow and have a bit of trust in me, but if it's truly wrong, then that will become evident, but it rarely does." (Coordinator)

But a mentee of the program thought differently:

A mentee's perspective

"In the beginning, you are just automatically matched to your mentor and then your six months officially starts. […] I would like it if you first had a meeting between the two persons and then can decide 'do I want to continue with this mentor?' because when I was [at the collective event] there were some mentors that I really didn't want to be paired with. I think that is the case for everyone. There were so many people, it is also an exciting moment: who is going to be your mentor? But there are also certain people with whom I really don't feel comfortable. I don't think it's a bad idea to let those two people have a conversation and then let them decide."

5.2.1.2 Duration and time frequency

An example from practice

"They start from the premise of needs and wants, you can't really put a time limit on that."

While some social mentoring programs have a clearly defined duration and closing moment, others choose to leave the duration open-ended. This second approach is sometimes favored because the process of integration is long and newcomers' needs and requests for assistance cannot, usually, be resolved in only a few months' time. Not having a fixed end date could also facilitate a more casual friendship to develop.

According to several coordinators who prefer a fixed end date, not having one comes with its own difficulties worth considering. Entering a commitment with no predetermined duration could scare some potential mentors off who do not want to commit to something so potentially long-lasting or simply cannot commit for longer than a set period. An example are students who will move away once they graduate but could still be great mentors for several months.

Once a duo is matched, they might not develop a relationship worth maintaining for the long term, run into problems, or perhaps they simply lose touch after a while. Having a clearly defined duration and closing moment can then also offer some relief and a nice way to wrap things up without having to deliberately ask the coordinator to terminate the relationship or letting the relationship fizzle out over time.

In terms of follow-up, a predetermined duration is straight-forward. Coordinators offer assistance and follow-up for that duration and if duos want to maintain their relationship after, they can but not within the context of the mentoring program. Not having a closing moment can complicate the follow-up. When do you stop contacting the duo? Continuing to offer assistance and follow-up for years, for example, is not only inefficient but also takes away time that could be used to match and follow-up on other duos. Nevertheless, some, often small-scale, programs do keep in touch with old mentors, though this is usually in a more informal and irregular manner than the first few months of the mentoring relationship.

Also consider that mentors who finalise their mentoring relationship after six months can, with their consent, be recuperated and matched with a new mentee. This not only eases the task of constantly having to find new mentors, but it also opens the program to more newcomers.

An example from practice

"The first three years we mainly worked as in: everytime someone joins, we consider them, do the intake, matching… but we noticed that we often lost the overview, it was very difficult in terms of follow-up, to know when, where etc. so there was not really a good system. So, with Compagnons 2.0 we looked at that properly and now we work with a new group every 3 months, new set-up, and where there is an end, namely after 6 months. We did that because we noticed during intervisions with mentors that it was sometimes difficult for them that there was no end, especially if things did not go as well or if the contact was reduced after some time. So now we say to the mentors and mentees: look, a trajectory of 6 months during which you are a duo, then there is a kind of farewell reception and then of course they choose whether they want to continue. For the matchings where it goes well, we know that it will continue naturally because they have become friends or 'family'. And the ones for which it did not go so well can wrap it up in a nice way, which is very important for mentors, also if you want to recuperate them for example."

Programs with a predetermined duration usually set it at six months. After those six months, some will officially terminate the mentoring relationship though those duos that want to continue their relationship can of course do so, but without the assistance of the program. For some programs, six months is a guideline that, while generally adhered to, can be extended for a shorter period of one or two months if participants indicate a continuing need for mentoring. Other programs offer extensions of six months. If duos want to continue their relationship after six months, they can extend it for another six months, during which they will continue as before and receive assistance from the program if needed and participate in organized activities.

While some programs leave the decision on contact frequency entirely up to participants, most programs set at least some minimum expectations. Mentors and mentees are typically expected to meet a minimum of two times per month. The exact frequency, day and time of meeting, location, and activity is to be decided by the mentor and mentee.

An example from practice

"We ask for at least 6 months and then back in blocks of 6 months so that it is extended. But we see in practice that many more go towards that year or year and a half rather than stopping at 6 months. After 6 months you are only just getting started."

Even though mentoring programs set frequency expectations and communicate these expectations at the beginning of the mentoring period – usually during the intake and/or first meeting between mentor and mentee – the extent to which they check whether participants uphold such expectations varies. Two programs require participants to communicate each meeting and activity to the program. This is required for the insurance that participants benefit from during their involvement in the mentoring program, but it also happens to be a convenient way to keep up with the duos and their contact frequency. In case participants have not informed coordinators about their activities and meerings in a while, coordinators will know to contact them to inquire about their progress. Most other programs choose not to check the contact frequency of participants, often due to time constraints or because they do not want to impose too many restrictions and responsibilities on participants. Nevertheless, coordinators usually contact participants every so often via mail or phone to check up on them, so those instances offer less formal opportunities to inquire about contact frequency, among other matters.

5.2.2 Activities during the mentoring relationship

The activities mentors and mentees engage in as part of their mentoring relationship vary depending on the goals of the mentoring program and the goals, needs and interests of the mentor and mentee themselves. While some programs restrict social mentoring to leisure activities, others allow for more all-round mentoring. The duos are usually given considerable freedom to decide the specific activities they want to do together though many programs offer suggestions via monthly emails, newsletters, or activity calendars.

An example from practice

All duos starting with Compagnons receive a WELCOME-pack with information and free entrance tickets for three attractions/activities. They also receive a monthly activity calendar with inspiration for free or cheap activities to do together.

An example from practice

Every month, the program in Leuven sends out a newsletter to current mentors with tips on how to be a good mentor, suggestions for activities and events and other useful information. (newsbrief example)

Based on our research, we can divide mentoring activities into two broad categories: leisure and assistance.

Table 8 Mentoring activities

Leisure	Assistance
Everyday activities: cooking, having dinner, going shopping, hanging out at home, walking the dog	Administrative assistance: reading and translating letters, tax forms, making appointments
Family activities: going to the playground, toy library, petting zoo	Educational assistance: tutoring, helping with applications, language learning
Cultural activities activities: museum, theater, cinema, special events	Housing assistance: looking for housing, liaising between mentee and landlord
Active activities: walking, hiking, running, biking, swimming	Employment assistance: looking for work opportunities, preparing for job interviews

Leisure activities include a wide range of activities that are commonly done among friends. Mentors often take the mentee to discover places throughout the city such as parks, museums, theaters, cinemas, libraries, and sport clubs. They can participate in creative activities or go to local events but often, duos engage in very ordinary, everyday activities. They will simply hang out together, cook together or for each other, eat at home or at a restaurant, have a drink, walk the dog, and go shopping. If mentor and/or mentee have children, they often do activities together with the children such as going to a playground or petting zoo or discovering the local toy library.

Sports are also a very common activity, either simply for leisure or because the mentee wants to learn a specific skill such as swimming or biking. One of the mentees wanted to learn how to swim so the mentor taught him over a period of several months. They continue to swim together even now, three years later. Another mentor arranged a bike for their mentee, and they now meet twice a week to bike or run together. Some of the sports duos do together are walking, hiking, running, biking, swimming, climbing, and rollerblading. Working out together does not require constant communication which makes it a good activity for those who do not (yet) share a common language.

Language acquisition is usually an integral part of a social mentoring program. While some mentors and mentees may choose to approach this very deliberately by preparing for the mentee's classes and exams, mentees usually improve their language skills by simply spending time with a native speaker and having opportunities to practice and ask questions while engaging in other activities. Since communication might be difficult in the beginning of the relationship due to language restrictions, doing something active, such as working out, is often preferable to meeting up for drinks, for example.

An example from practice

"Certainly, the first few times, we do recommend doing an activity because just sitting at the table together and talking is very difficult. But we also say it is certainly not necessary to 'make' time for your mentee but try to involve the person in daily activities, in things you do anyway so going to the store or cooking or going for a walk. […] As example we give that does not require language is, if they meet at home, to sit together behind the computer and listen to Youtube. The mentee can have the mentor listen to music of their country or look on Google Earth where they come from, and they can tell how they came to be here."

In addition to doing leisure activities together, mentors may also help mentees with more practical concerns. As new inhabitants, mentees will usually have to arrange various forms of assistance, services, and other necessities. Even if the focus of the mentoring is supposed to be leisure activities, mentors will usually assist mentees with these tasks by sharing information, translating letters and other important documents, helping them with their taxes, and accompanying them to appointments with the municipality, doctor, school etc.

Assistance may also include helping mentees look for housing and/or liaising between the mentee and their landlord, finding employment opportunities and preparing the mentee for job interviews, tutoring them or their children, and accompanying them to parent-teacher meetings, among others. One of the mentors arranged a job interview for their mentee and accompanied them to the interview while another taught their mentee how to drive a car. These are far-reaching tasks and are often considered outside the realm of social mentoring but they are common in practice. Some coordinators allow these forms of assistance as long as both participants have no problem with the mentor providing assistance of this kind. Other programs will intervene and refer the mentee to relevant professionals.

The relationship between mentor and mentee often develops over time and so do the activities they engage in. Mentees often require more practical assistance in the beginning but once those immediate needs are met, the relationship will usually primarily revolve around leisure activities with perhaps the occassional question or request for assistance if a need arises for the mentee. One of the mentees required considerable study guidance at the beginning, from helping with homework and preparing for exams to scheduling. Over time the mentee did not only improve their knowledge of the local language but also became more independent and confident in their abilities. Nowadays, the mentor and mentee are friends and primarily engage in leisure activities.

While duos often terminate their relationship at the end of the formal mentoring period, others continue their relationship as friends. Over time, they may even celebrate holidays together, go to each other's birthday parties, and go on trips together. In some exceptional cases, former mentors and mentees referred to each other as family.

An example from practice

"The experience with [mentee] was very fascinating and still is. It has evolved in the meantime. Now I don't consider him a refugee anymore, he's just a citizen of [city] and we do things together, we go out to eat or cook or play sports or go to the theater. He's just one of my friends. You don't think about it anymore, or almost never at least. We've also been on trips together. It doesn't necessarily have to be that way but if it is, that's pretty cool."

An example from practice

"We also tell the mentors it's not all doom and gloom of course, it's about going for a walk, about social interaction, to get to know each other's culture. We have mentoring couples who have been celebrating holidays together for years now, or who are invited to each other's birthday parties, who just cook together once a week, and that's all part of it. We also don't want to reduce the mentor to someone who just puts out the fires or fills in the gaps left by the professionals, nor do we want only those mentors who are going to solve the world's problems and who are only there for relief assistance. We always say: it's about connecting and getting to know people."

5.2.3 Exchange based on equality and respect

A mentor and mentee relationship is prone to asymmetry and paternalism. Even if programs advocate for equality between mentor and mentee, truly achieving such equality is difficult if not impossible.

While equality between participants may be difficult to achieve, coordinators emphasize that the relationship should not be entirely one-sided and should benefit both mentee and mentor. The benefits for the mentee are more obvious. They often improve their language skills, become more involved in their local community, and receive other practical support that helps them get settled in their new city. In addition to all the practical ways that mentors assist mentees, mentees also benefit in more indirect ways. Through their mentoring relationship, they gain more confidence and become more independent. However, even if the benefits for the mentee are more pronounced and emphasized by mentoring programs, mentors benefit from the relationship in a number of ways.

According to one mentor, their relationships with several mentees increased their empathic abilities. The mentor became more aware and knowledgable about the struggles refugees face and developed a deeper sense of respect for them. Almost all mentors expressed similar personal developments. While they were all supportive of refugees before their involvement in the mentoring program, their relationship with the mentee had a significant influence on their thinking. Mentors became more vocal about immigration policy and diversity and would call out friends if they said something harmful or ignorant. They became more knowledgable about the mentee's religion and developed more respect for religious differences. One creative mentor started incorporating themes of diversity, migration and belonging in their art.

Mentors also benefited in other ways. Mentees would show their appreciation and reciprocate by showing an interest in the life of their mentor, cooking for them, and inviting them into their home. One of the mentors taught the daughter of the family she was mentoring how to ride a bike and swim and when she was ill, the family would visit her and bring food to her door. Preparing food for the mentor was one of the main ways that mentees showed their appreciation. Such signs of appreciation help the mentor feel valued and create a feeling of reciprocity and appreciation that can be difficult to achieve otherwise.

An example from practice

Another mentoring duo attributed their successful relationship not only to similar interests but also to a sense of mutual respect and interest in each other's lives. Their ability to have good conversations about almost any topic, including culture, religion, and politics, helped to create a strong and long-lasting bond. At the beginning, the mentee was still finding their place and figuring out how to practice their faith in a new country. Having a mentor who was very open to talk about such matters, who listened and asked questions without judgment, was exactly what the mentee needed at that time and set the stage for a friendship that is still strong, even three years after the official mentoring period.

An example from practice

"You can't know in advance who you will end up with but what I think is very important is that those two people really respect each other. That is really the basis to build on. But on the other hand, I also expect you to be very honest with each other and build a trustworthy relationship. For example, in my case, I can trust [mentor] in all aspects. […] I would like to think a mentor is a person you can talk to about almost anything, that would be an ideal situation for me, that you have respect for each other and build a reliable relationship and are honest with each other. Everything else you can figure out later." (Mentee)

An example from practice

"You should be open to other cultures. […] Not always saying: 'yes but in Belgium we do it like this.' I said that a lot in the beginning until I thought, well that is actually discrimination, it's like saying we do it better. You need to get away from that idea a little bit." (Mentor)

According to several coordinators, mentors and mentees, this reciprocity and mutual interest and respect are important characteristics of successful mentoring relationships.

One important demonstration of reciprocity and mutual respect is the commitment participants have to the mentoring relationship. In situations where one participant was more committed than the other, the relationship was often terminated prematurely. After a mentee family failed to show up for their appointments with the mentor, did not cancel or apologize, and called the mentor late at night multiple times, the coordinator scheduled a meeting with all parties to discuss the relationship. When there were no improvements after two interventions, the mentor decided to put an end to the mentoring relationship. Without mutual appreciation and commitment, a mentoring relationship is bound to fail.

However, the mentor will usually have to take intiative, especially in the beginning of the relationship. They will have to schedule meetings with the mentee and suggest activities. While this may change as the relationship develops, coordinators often inform mentors before the mentoring commences that they will likely have to take initiative and stress that this does not signal disinterest on the part of the mentee. Not every mentee will feel comfortable enough to take the first step to contact the mentor. This may be due to cultural differences or because the mentor is a volunteer who already does a lot for them, and they might feel uncomfortable 'burdening' the mentor. This 'restraint' is not necessarily only related to cultural differences. Perhaps the mentee perceives a difference in social status or time availability. Not every mentee will have the confidence to take the first step right away.

An example from practice

"Of course, in the initial period, we often see that the initiative comes mainly from the mentor […] but as the relationship improves and we see that it is going well, we also expect that the newcomer does not sit and wait but that they also dare to ask help from the mentor. […] It goes well the moment that the newcomer asks some questions, takes pictures of questions they have for example a letter they received and a 'can you translate that for me?'. So, the more it comes from the newcomers' side, the better it goes. Because a mentor may think: 'does it always have to come from my side?"

When asked what is important for a match to succeed, one of the coordinators said the following:

An example from practice

"If the mentor has the feeling that they can really mean something to the newcomer, that the newcomer trusts them and that they are also inviting towards the mentor. We have some mentors who are insecure in that respect and then you get those uncomfortable situations where the mentor sometimes asks: 'does this newcomer actually like me?' And then they get a bit uncomfortable. So, that feeling of trust or confirmation and some eagerness on the part of the newcomer, we see that this is really equality because otherwise we sometimes have the case that mentors become very insecure or they start to do more than usual or they won't do their best anymore, so yes, that trust and confirmation."

Even if a relationship is successful, there may still be times when one of the participants is asked or expected to do something they do not feel comfortable with. This could be a request from the mentee that the mentor does not want or know how to solve or a mentor who takes their mentoring too far. One coordinator recalled a situation in which a mentor became too involved and persistent, pressuring the mentee to study or work so much that they eventually stopped answering the mentor's messages.

The importance of setting and guarding boundaries is emphasized by all program coordinators. In social mentoring programs, problems with boundaries often arise when the mentor is expected to or willingly takes on responsibilities of professionals such as the mentee's social worker. Programs typically offer mentor training sessions on the topic of boundaries and discuss its importance during the intake and/or info session. Even though programs can inform and support participants on setting and guarding their own boundaries, it is up to participants to decide what their boundaries are and to communicate them to their mentor/mentee if necessary. Coordinators can guide them on how to do this and can intervene when boundaries are crossed.

5.2.4 Concluding the mentoring relationship

After the predetermined duration of the mentoring relationship, most programs will organize some type of closing moment, which may be an event for all mentors and mentees, a meeting with the duo, or a meeting with the mentor and/or mentee separately. Programs without a set duration and/or consistent follow-up may not have a final event or meeting or will only organize it at the request of (one of) the participants. As a result, relationships in such programs often dwindle over time without a satisfying conclusion.

Some programs organize a collective event to wrap up a mentoring period. This works well for programs that recruit and match participants for a specific period (e.g., January to June) so that a whole group of mentors and mentees start and end at the same time. For programs with continuous recruitment and matching, which are especially common for programs in small municipalities who will usually struggle to assemble a group large enough to match them all at once and have them start at the same time, a collective closing event usually does not make sense as duos will start and finish at various times. Usually, such programs will have a talk with the mentor or the duo after the mentoring period to discuss their experience and possible points of improvement.

One of the programs changed their approach after peer learning sessions with mentors revealed that it was sometimes difficult for mentors that there was no specific end, especially when the mentoring was less successful, or the mentor and mentee lost touch after a while. Nowadays, the program organizes a closing event so that participants can properly wrap up the mentoring period and decide whether they want to continue their relationship outside of the program and/or whether the mentor wants to mentor a new mentee. At the event, participants are also asked to share their opinion of the program via evaluation forms. This not only contributes to the improvement of the mentoring program but also provides another opportunity to hear from the mentees who are usually not included in follow-up, training, and peer learning. According to the coordinator, the evaluation forms gave them some indication of the evolution of a mentee's language skills in writing.

According to one of the coordinators, this event is also the perfect opportunity to thank mentors and mentees

for their participation in the program. This show of appreciation for participants and especially the volunteers (mentors) can contribute to the recuperation of mentors and to recruitment of new participants through positive word-of-mouth.

An example from practice

The mentoring program in Leuven sent out cards to all their mentors to thank them for their commitment to the program during the corona pandemic. (example)

An example from practice

Samen Gentenaar organises a group activity to wrap up each mentoring period. After a guided tour at the townhall, participants can evaluate the program. When this was no longer possible due to COVID-19, they went on a group walk and had drinks. Participants were later emailed for their feedback. Mentors are always asked whether they want to be recuperated into the program.

An example from practice

According to the coordinator of Compagnons Oostende "a project stands or falls with its volunteers." Because of that "you have to pamper them, you have to really appreciate them. And we think it is normal that every once in a while, they get a thank you or in a different way, that they get the feeling that they are really appreciated, which also means you can keep them involved in the project more easily. And they will propagate it to the outside world."

Mentors and mentees can also terminate the mentoring relationship prematurely. In that case, they will usually contact the coordinator themselves to discuss their request for termination. Some coordinators choose not to spend too much time on such terminations, especially if the person has already made up their mind. They will discuss the matter via phone and leave it at that. Others will schedule a meeting with the mentor and/or mentee to discuss the reason for the premature termination, to receive their input on the program, and, if relevant, to ask if the mentor wants to be recuperated and/or if the mentee wants a new mentor.

5.3 Recommendations

- ✓ Programs should have a clearly defined mentoring duration (e.g., six months) that can be extended upon request.
- ✓ Programs should set expectations in terms of contact frequency (e.g., at least twice a month).
- ✓ Programs should schedule a first meeting with the mentor, mentee, and coordinator before the mentoring relationship starts. If the mentee was referred to the program, the referrer should also be invited to the meeting.
- ✓ Programs should use this first meeting to reiterate the main objectives of the program, their expectations, and the role of the mentor.
- ✓ Programs should have duos schedule their next meeting during this first meeting to prevent early dropout.
- ✓ Programs should give both participants an opportunity to decline the match after the first meeting.
- ✓ Programs should let participants decide what activities they want to do but set expectations at the beginning of the relationship and provide an overview of acceptable (and unacceptable) activities.
- ✓ Programs should provide suggestions for activities, for example via a newsletter or activity calendar.
- ✓ Programs may seek partnerships with local businesses and organisations to arrange free tickets or coupons for activities for their participants.
- ✓ Programs should inform mentors that they will be expected to take initiative, especially at the beginning of the mentoring relationship, but that, over time, decisions should be made collaboratively.
- ✓ Programs may facilitate communication between the mentor and professional assistance when necessary to agree on a clear division of tasks and responsibilities, set boundaries, and avoid conflict during the mentoring relationship.

6 | Follow-up and role of the coordinator

While mentors and mentees have a significant influence on the outcome, and ultimately the success of a mentoring relationship, the organization of the mentoring program also has an important role to play. In this chapter, we will delve deeper into the support and follow-up that social mentoring organizations provide to their participants. After briefly discussing the literature on the topic, we discuss our findings from practice, followed by a list of recommendations.

6.1 According to the literature

Providing monitoring and support for mentoring relationships is one of the primary responsibilities of program staff and crucial to the success of a mentoring program. Martin and Sifers (2012) found that relationships that are monitored and supported by program staff are associated with greater mentor satisfaction within the relationship.

Research on youth mentoring found that regular contact between participants and program staff is linked to longer-lasting relationships, stronger relationships, and more frequent meetings between the mentor and mentee (Herrera et al., 2013; Herrera et al., 2000). Mentors' perceptions of the quality of support were positively associated with mentee reports of better relationship quality (feelings of closeness and growth/goal orientation), and with the duration of the relationship (Herrera, 2007; Herrera et al., 2013). The importance of quality follow-up and a good relationship between staff and mentors to the retention of mentors has also been reiterated by Behnia (2007).

In their study on youth mentoring, Herrera et al. (2013) found that most mentors who receive support phone calls from the mentoring program consider them helpful in strengthening their relationship. Receiving consistent feedback from the program could also impact mentors' feelings of self-efficacy with greater self-efficacy resulting in higher satisfaction with the relationship, more frequent meetings with their mentees, fewer challenges in the mentoring relationship, more perceived benefits for mentees, and higher overall quality of the mentoring relationship (Karcher et al., 2005; Martin & Sifers, 2012; Parra et al., 2002).

According to Herrera et al. (2013), more capable coordinators are able to foster relationships that are higher in quality and last longer. In addition to providing support and monitoring, coordinators can promote participation in the program and retention of volunteers by recognizing and celebrating their achievements (Bayer et al., 2015). Culp and Schwartz (1998) found that volunteers consider informal, intrinsic rewards such as thank-you notes and 'a pat on the back' more meaningful than formal, extrinsic rewards.

In their study on formal mentoring schemes across the UK, Gannon and Washington (2019) found that program coordinators undertake a diversity of activities, from planning the mentoring process, recruiting the pool of mentors, matching mentors and mentees, monitoring and supporting the mentoring relationships, and evaluating their own mentoring schemes to arranging and conducting training for participants, organizing networking and other events, and bidding for funding. When coordinators were asked to identify the three main skills required to successfully coordinate a mentoring program, popular responses included both general organizational skills as well as more interpersonal, people-oriented skills. The following table from Gannon and Washington (2019) presents the most popular responses.

Table 9 Top three main skills areas for mentoring scheme coordinators

Skills area 1	Skills area 2	Skills area 3
Organisational skills	Time management	Flexibility
Communication skills	People/social skills	Relationship management
Mentoring and coaching knowledge and skills	Empathy	Matching skills and knowledge
Leadership	Listening skills	Networking skills

6.2 In practice

6.2.1 Role and profile of the coordinator

Coordinators of social mentoring programs for newcomers tend to work alone due to the small scale and limited funds available for such programs. As such, they take on a wide variety of roles and tasks.

Coordinator responsibilities

When FMDO wanted to start a mentoring program (now known as Compagnons) in Oostende, they posted a job vacancy for a project officer. According to the job description, the officer would be responsible for:

- *General follow-up and development of the project*
- *Promotion and drafting of the promotional campaign of the project*
- *Point of contact for (candidate) mentors*
- *Matching mentors and newcomers*
- *Developing support material and inspirational lists for activities for the mentors and mentees*
- *Organising intervision (peer learning) sessions for mentors*
- *Follow-up of mentors and mentees*
- *Follow-up with Public Centre for Social Welfare (main partner) and other partners in the framework of the project*

The ideal coordinator

The same job vacancy of FMDO also gives an insight into the ideal profile of a coordinator of a social mentoring program for newcomers. According to FMDO, a coordinator should be someone who:

- *Has a dynamic personality*
- *Can write well and has good communication and administrative skills*
- *Is a born networker*
- *Possesses strong organisational skills*
- *Is flexible*
- *Does not mind working during evenings and weekends*
- *Preferably has feeling for diversity and knowledge of other languages*
- *Has at least a bachelor's degree*

In addition, the coordinator is typically also responsible for interviewing mentor and mentee candidates. In case a program has additional members of staff or interns, the coordinator might also be responsible for general management duties.

6.2.2 Support and follow-up

In the previous chapters, we have already discussed several common tasks of a coordinator: recruitment of new mentors and mentees, screening and selection of candidates, and matching selected mentors and mentees. However, a match between a mentor and mentee does not signal the end of a coordinator's responsibilities. One of the most important tasks of a coordinator is supporting and following-up with the participants of the mentoring program.

While all programs offer some level of support, the extent of this support can vary significantly, from closer to more distant. Close monitoring involves personal contact, is proactive, and occurs on a regular basis (e.g., monthly). When monitoring is more distant, contact may be via email, is rather reactive in nature, and occurs sporadically. Social mentoring programs differ significantly in their monitoring approach. Programs who opt for more distant forms of follow-up usually do so because their resources are limited. Many coordinators prefer a close follow-up, even if they are currently unable to implement it themselves though there are some who stress the personal responsibility of mentors and mentees and deliberately opt for more distant follow-up.

An example from practice

Samen Thuis in Hasselt is one of the programs that deliberately opts for a more distant type of follow-up. They mainly see themselves as a mediator between newcomers and Belgians. The program brings them into contact but from then on, it is up to the participants to make it work: "we give you a chance to meet each other and then it's up to you."

While distant support may involve sending sporadic follow-up emails, coordinators who adopt this monitoring strategy will usually expect the participant to contact them if they have a problem and/or need advice. This is what we refer to as a reactive follow-up approach.

Whether a more distant or close type of follow-up influences the quality and success of a mentoring relationship is difficult to deduce from our results. This will require further research. A coordinator of a program with a more distant follow-up did mention that they might not hear about problems in a relationship until the last moment though this problem appears common among all programs, including those with closer types of follow-ups. Nevertheless, following up with participants regularly can at least help coordinators to learn about and addresses a problem before it becomes insurmountable.

A close follow-up can include both formal and informal moments of contact between the coordinator and the participant. One of the most common formal monitoring options is follow-up via phone which involves the coordinator contacting the participant(s) on a regular basis to inquire about the ongoing relationship as well as any difficulties and/or questions participants might have. Coordinators who use this follow-up strategy often mainly adopt it during the first few months of the relationship, after which they will likely stop or reduce the frequency of their follow-up, depending on how the relationship is progressing.

Examples from practice

What constitutes a 'regular basis' of follow-up differs from program to program. Tandem, for example, calls mentors 7 to 10 days after the start of the mentoring relationship, organises a monthly (online) get-together for mentors, sends them an email with tips every 3 weeks and requires a message every time they meet with their mentee. Fedasil Kapellen, on the other hand, contacts participants after one month and after two months. After the second month, they contact them every two months until the end of the mentoring relationship.

Even those programs who offer close follow-up do not typically offer in-person one-on-one support. Coordinators usually only see their participants one-on-one or as a duo when a problem arises. If one or both participants indicate that there is a conflict or problem, the coordinator will usually invite them to their office to discuss the matter and find a solution that works for both.

Other informal moments of contact often take place during program activities such as mentor training sessions, peer learning sessions, or group activities. Many programs struggle to provide regular follow-ups for all individual participants due to limited resources so group activities offer convenient opportunities to follow-up with multiple participants at once. Organizations may also have other programs or activities such as a language cafe

where newcomers can practice their language skills by talking to native speakers and other language learners in a very informal setting. Other common opportunities for interaction include other informal language classes or learning opportunities, walk-in hours at the organization, or other activities organized by the organization but not exclusive to the mentoring program. Such activities are usually accessible to anyone, voluntary, and organized on a regular basis (e.g., once a week, once a month, etc.). If the coordinator of the mentoring program is present, such collective events provide opportunities for interaction and informal follow-up with participants of the mentoring program. This is especially important on the side of the mentee. Most programs focus their regular follow-up efforts on the mentor so when they meet mentees at collective events, it provides a unique opportunity to get their input and perspective on the mentoring relationship.

A main shortcoming of social mentoring programs is the limited to non-existent follow-up of mentees. According to most coordinators, this is primarily due to time constraints. They will rely on the mentor to pass on relevant information to the mentee and to inform the coordinator in case the mentee experiences problems or has a need for professional assistance. However, this one-sided follow-up could lead the coordinator to miss important information about the mentoring relationship and does not contribute to the equality between participants that social mentoring programs often strive for.

A mentee's perspective

"I have no contact with [organisation]. They never told me 'you have a point of contact' for example in case something is wrong. I think that could also be a point of improvement: if there is something, you can come to us. I have never heard that, they just matched me."

6.2.3 Approachability and accessibility

To an extent, all programs, even those with closer monitoring, will require participants to reach out to them in case of problems. Even with regular follow-up, it can be difficult to remain up to date on all duos, especially for larger mentoring programs. To get participants to contact the coordinator when the need arises, the program and coordinator should feel approachable and accessible. Most coordinators identify approachability and accessibility as some of the most important characteristics of a successful mentoring program. Their monitoring approach (distant or close) had no influence on the importance they placed on being approachable and accessible to participants.

Approachability and accessibility relate both to the coordinator and the program itself. Participants should feel comfortable contacting and talking to the coordinator, and the coordinator should be easy to reach and readily available for help and advice. Coordinators usually try to explain their role during the intake or first meeting with participants. During these early stages of the mentoring process, they will usually establish themselves as the go-to person for advice and support.

The mentoring program's approachability and accessibility is largely determined by the atmosphere created by the coordinator and organization. One coordinator stressed the importance of creating an atmosphere that is easily distinguishable from the formal settings newcomers often find themselves in when they first arrive in a new city. When they visit the coordinator, it should not feel as though they are at their social worker's office or immigration service. Participants were free to walk into the office any time during working hours and could contact the coordinator at almost any time, even in the evening or during the weekend. The coordinator could be reached by phone, social media, and/or Whatsapp and participants had many opportunities to meet the coordinator and each other. According to one coordinator, creating this 'familial' atmosphere was more beneficial to mentors than any formal training session could ever be. The informal, accessible character of social mentoring is exactly what sets it apart from other programs and forms of assistance. It is this informality and accessibility that many coordinators consider pivotal for a successful social mentoring program.

An example from practice

"We are always available to them. They know that we can be reached 24/24 with their questions. […] And certainly before corona, the mentors often dropped in on us. We encourage that too, we say: 'if you are in the neighborhood, drop in. Let us know how it goes and not only when there are problems, but also when it's going well.' We just like to be kept informed. There are some mentors who just drop by or give us a call to catch up. Only we still miss the newcomers' side of things, we really want to ask them how they experience their participation in the mentoring program. I think that is the biggest shortcoming we have." (Leuven)

An example from practice

"The professional [program coordinator] should be a clear and accessible point of contact during the mentoring process that a mentor and family go through. The coordinator follows up on requests for help from families if these can be followed up within the framework of the mentoring program and/or the organization and/or refers them to the organizations which are competent for a specific matter. The professional is also available to support the mentor and should ensure that the context is appropriate and accessible so that the mentor can function and carry out the volunteer work properly. For example: clear use of language, customized training, communicating through tools that are user-friendly, providing information on activities that the mentor and family can participate in, etc." (Tandem)

6.2.4 Coordination with professionals

Mentors in social mentoring programs participate on a voluntary basis. As such, there are limits to what can be expected of them and what they should be allowed to do. A mentor is not supposed to replace the mentee's social worker and/or other professionals but works alongside and in addition to such professional forms of support. This is exactly because mentors can do what professionals cannot: spend quality time with the newcomer, accompany them to organizations, sport clubs, and events, and offer small administrative and practical assistance such as reading and translating letters.

Oftentimes, the assistance offered by mentors goes far beyond what is expected of them. Mentors will become involved in the mentee's search for housing, education and/or employment, or in some cases even in their asylum cases and communication with lawyers and other professionals.

While some programs refrain from intervening and let the participants decide how involved they want the mentor to be, most will step in if they think the mentor is taking on tasks that are supposed to be handled by professionals. Mentors may have good intention, but their lack of expert knowledge can have unintended and detrimental consequences. Examples include a mentor who gave the wrong advice to their mentee which made them almost lose their immigration status or a mentor who suggested to their mentee that they should refuse to pay their rental deposit.

While this is difficult to avoid entirely in practice, it can be significantly reduced by improving communication with both professionals and participants. One aspect of this is setting expectations at the start of the program and clearly delineating what a mentor can and cannot do. This is preferably done in cooperation with, or at least with input from, the social worker and, if relevant, other professionals assisting the mentee, and communicated to both mentor and mentee. According to coordinators, ongoing communication with professionals is also important to ensure that they have the correct expectations of the program and the mentor and will not delegate their own responsibilities to the mentor.

An example from practice

"I recently had an intake between a mentor and mentee, which took place in the Public Centre for Social Welfare itself with the presence of the social worker of the mentee and in that way, the mentor also knows the social worker, and they can exchange information with each other. For example, a social worker had asked: would you like to go to the housing service together with the mentee? So, the tasks or role of the mentor are already defined so that there is no double work. And it is also not the intention that the mentor becomes the social worker of the mentee, so, if possible, the social worker is present [during the first meeting]."

Failing to clearly delineate the tasks and role of the mentor may lead to conflict between the mentor and professional because either 1) the mentor thinks the professional is not doing enough for the mentee and relying too much on the mentor to offer assistance that goes beyond their voluntary commitment or 2) the professional thinks the mentor is doing too much for the mentee and in doing so interferes with the work of the professional. Depending on the situation, the coordinator will then have to contact the mentor and/or professional in hopes of resolving the conflict or incorrect assignment of responsibilities.

Another way to improve the coordination with and between the mentor and professionals is to stimulate communication between them early on in the mentoring process. Some programs opt to have the mentor and referrer meet during the first meeting with the mentee while others provide contact information and give the mentor the option of contacting the professional. At the same time, some programs reason that coordination between mentor and professional assumes that there should be responsibility sharing when in reality, the mentor is only supposed to do leisure activities or offer small assistance, neither of which require coordination with professionals. According to them, mentors should not be burdened with unneccessary tasks and responsibilities that go far beyond their voluntary commitment to the program.

6.2.5 After the mentoring relationship

Once the mentoring relationship ends, most programs will no longer offer support and follow-up. Mentors and mentees can of course choose to remain in touch. This is usually not explicitly discussed by the parties involved but is instead an organic progression of the relationship between the mentor and mentee. Most duos that continue their relationship after the formal conclusion do so because they have become friends.

Even if programs no longer offer formal follow-up, they often continue to email former participants and invite them to events, unless participants request to be taken off the mailing list. Some programs and organizations also offer other events and activities that former participants will frequent which allows the coordinator to remain in touch with some of them. For example, one of the programs organizes a get-together once a month where former and current duos as well as the general public can interact. Another program, which is organized by a non-profit organization, observes and supports the transfer of volunteers within the organization. While some of their volunteers may no longer be involved in the mentoring program, they will still be active within the overarching organization and therefore often continue to be in touch with the program coordinator.

Programs without a predetermined mentoring duration and end date will usually continue to provide support for as long as the relationship lasts. It should be noted, however, that programs without a set duration are usually the same programs that offer minimal support and follow-up in general. The support they do offer will usually lessen over time as the mentoring relationship either turns into friendship or dwindles until it stops altogether.

Cases Samen Gentenaar & Samen Thuis in Hasselt

The different approaches to support and follow-up can be illustrated by comparing two social mentoring programs.

Samen Gentenaar is a social mentoring program for newcomers in Ghent, Belgium. It is organized by IN-Gent, an government agency that bears responsibility for the operational implementation of Flemish integration policy in the city of Ghent. Samen Gentenaar operates within a clear framework and structure and offers considerable support and follow-up to its participants.

While the program has no fixed start dates, it usually starts three times a year for a duration of six months, with groups overlapping. Once the waiting list is long enough, the coordinator will schedule a collective info session. Attendance at the session is a requirement to participate in the program. During the info session, the coordinator provides information about the program and candidates can fill out an intake form. Once the coordinator has matched all mentors and mentees, they will be invited to a collective event where they will meet their match for the first time. During their mentoring relationship, duos are expected to meet at least twice a month and must communicate each activity they do to the coordinator via e-mail. While this is an insurance requirement, it also allows for regular monitoring. Participants are also invited to intervisions of which there are three during each mentoring period: one for mentors, one for mentees, and one mixed. In addition, the program organizes group activities, mentor trainings, and duo's are invited to OPEN-BAR, a monthly meet-up of newcomers and long-time residents of Ghent. After six months, duos are invited to a collective closing event and asked to fill out an evaluation form. Support and follow-up cease after the event though former duos will still be invited to OPEN-BAR.

Samen Thuis in Hasselt is a social mentoring program for newcomers that is organized by Avansa Limburg. Avansa is a socio-cultural organization with twelve other regional offices throughout Flanders and Brussels. Samen Thuis in Hasselt offers minimal support and follow-up and describes their approach as follows: "we give you an opportunity to meet and then it's up to you."

Interested candidates are invited to an individual intake interview with the program coordinator. During this interview, they will be informed about the program and asked about their motivation and other information necessary for screening and matching. The program has no collective start event. Duos can start their mentoring relationship any time during the year. Once the coordinator has found a good match, the mentor and mentee will be invited for a first meeting. The coordinator attends the meeting for the first 15 minutes, asks the duo to schedule their next meeting, and then leaves them to get to know one another. Once the mentoring relationship starts, the coordinator takes a step back. They will follow-up with the duo after a month and at the end of the mentoring period, which is usually six months. Follow-up is done via phone. While a minimum meeting frequency of once a month is suggested, this is not monitored, and participants are expected to contact the program if they need assistance. Mentors are informed about external trainings but are not required to attend. While the program used to organize intervisions, they stopped due to low turn-out. Starting next year, they will organize an annual group activity for all participants of the program.

6.3 Recommendations

- ✓ Programs should offer proactive follow-up at regular intervals to inquire about the progress of the relationship, any difficulties, and questions.
- ✓ Programs should provide follow-up to both mentor and mentee.
- ✓ Programs should have at least one in-person follow-up moment during the mentoring period.
- ✓ Programs should have a monitoring mechanism in place and ask duos to share their progress and activities regularly.
- ✓ Programs should be accessible and easily approachable to all participants. The coordinator should be easy to reach and talk to and readily available for help and advice.
- ✓ Programs should recognise the achievements of mentors so as to strenghten mentors' commitment to the program and improve retention rates.
- ✓ In case of a conflict or need that needs handling before the relationship can continue, programs should intervene and schedule a meeting with both or one of the participants of a mentoring relationship.
- ✓ Programs should have a clear closing procedure that is communicated to mentors and mentees before they begin their mentoring relationship.
- ✓ Programs should schedule a final talk at the end of the mentoring period or when a relationship ends prematurely.
- ✓ Programs may organise a final group activity to wrap up each mentoring period.
- ✓ Programs should ask participants to evaluate the program and use this input to make improvements to the program.
- ✓ Programs should cease support and follow-up once a relationship ends. They may choose to keep former participants somewhat involved in the program by, for example, sending them newsletters, inviting them to group activities, or reaching out with new mentoring opportunities

7 | Training, peer learning and group activities

While the relationship between a mentor and mentee and the follow-up of that relationship by the program coordinator are central to any mentoring program, most programs also organize additional events and activities. Most commonly, these include (mentor) training sessions, peer learning sessions, and group activities. In this chapter, we will discuss all three in the same structure that we have maintained throughout this report: first, we discuss extant literature, followed by our findings from practice, after finally concluding with a list of recommendations based on the two previous sections.

7.1 According to the literature

Research on social mentoring programs for newcomers is almost non-existent and the studies that do exist do not focus on mentor training, peer learning, or group activities. For this section, we thus primarily rely on research that focuses on other types of mentoring, specifically youth mentoring.

According to Allen et al. (2006) and Neuwirth and Wahl (2017), the success of a mentoring program is positively related to the presence of training programs and their quality. Programs with ongoing training show better mentoring outcomes for their mentees than programs that do not offer trainings (DuBois et al., 2002). In their study of a community-based youth mentoring program, Parra et al. (2002) found that mentors' perceived quality of training was a positive predictor of mentor efficacy ratings, which in turn showed a positive association with contact frequency, fewer relationship obstacles, and greater involvement in program-relevant activities.

Allen et al. (2006) found that the hours spent in training related positively to psychosocial mentoring but was negatively associated with mentor-reported relationship quality and role modeling. The authors suggest that a greater investment in the mentoring program through training may intrude too much into the busy schedules of mentors or disproportionately raise mentor expectations of the program. Nevertheless, Martin and Sifers (2012) found that the amount of training is positively associated with mentor satisfaction with the mentoring relationship and beneficial mentoring outcomes. According to Herrera et al. (2000), who studied school-based mentoring programs for children, mentors who receive more than six hours of training develop the closest and most supportive relationships with their mentees whereas mentors who receive two hours of training or less develop the least close relationships. However, Parra et al. (2002) note that even a limited amount of training can lead to better mentoring results.

Trainings should vary according to the stage of the mentoring process (Kupersmidt & Rhodes, 2013). Pre-match training has been shown to contribute to mentors' feelings of self-efficacy, which can, in turn, improve the quality of the mentoring relationship and the outcomes for the mentee (Karcher et al., 2005; Martin & Sifers, 2012). According to Allen et al. (2006), pre-match training can make the mentoring relationship more rewarding by identifying the objectives of the program, the parameters of the relationship, and by establishing mutually agreed-upon expectations. By setting mutual expectations at the beginning of a mentoring relationship programs can contribute to mentor satisfaction and engagement and prevent early drop-out (Drew et al., 2020; Madia & Lutz, 2004). Post-match training can be useful once mentors have had some experience with mentoring and have specific questions or concerns. According to Strapp et al. (2014), post-match training could help mentors deal with setbacks and maintain or restore commitment to the program and relationship.

According to Reeves (2017), mentor competence in navigating cultural and other differences could contribute to more fruitful mentoring relationships. Johnson-Bailey (2012) has identified several practices that can help

mentors during their mentoring relationship with their mentee: 1) a willingness to extend beyond normal mentoring expectations, 2) an understanding of the psychological and social effects of racism, 3) cultural competence, 4) an understanding of the mentors' social identity and 5) an acceptance of the risk and possible discomfort implicit in mentoring across racial lines. Cultural competency training and mentor-to-mentor contact have been shown to have a positive influence on mentor satisfaction and retention (MENTOR, 2015; Stukas and Tanti (2005). Van 't Hoog et al. (2012) recommends mentor intervision or 'peer learning' as a good way for mentors to exchange tips and experiences on how to deal with cultural differences.

7.2 In Pratice

7.2.1 Mentor training

7.2.1.1 Training content

Table 10 Mentor training topics

General	Program-specific
Communication and clear language	Social map of the city
Setting boundaries	Life in the reception centre
One-offs	
Psychological well-being and needs of refugees	Public employment service
Volunteering during the corona pandemic	Public Centre for Social Welfare

One of the most common trainings offered by mentoring programs focuses on communication and plain language i.e., how to talk with a non-native speaker.

Training on communication and clear language

Most social mentoring programs for newcomers in Flanders make use of the trainings offered by the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration , particularly the one on communicating accessibly with non-native speakers. The training covers the following:

- *10 tips on how to communicate with non-native speakers, supported by video material, photos, and illustrations*
- *Practice exercises in small groups*
- *Background information on language development, low literarcy and illiteracy.*

Another common training focuses on setting boundaries. Even though programs discuss this topic during their info session and/or intake, they continue to be faced with situations in which participants' boundaries are not protected or respected. Offering a training session on this topic is supposed to provide additional tools for mentors and help them set their limits and practice self-care. Similarly, one of the programs is considering a training on the relationship with professionals to help mentors figure out how where their responsibilities lie and when and how they should communicate effectively with the mentee's professional assistance.

Some programs offer program-specific training sessions. One of the mentoring programs is targeted at newcomers in reception centres. To inform mentors about the living situation and prospects of the mentees, they include information on daily life in the reception centre and the asylum system in the training. Another program organizes a training on the social map of the city. In this mandatory training, mentors are informed about the professional and voluntary assistance available in the city such as legal support, mental health clinics, housing support services, employment sercices, food banks, thrift stores, education, childcare, and leisure activities.

Participants are also given a useful overview that they can consult everytime their mentee has a question or need that they cannot directly answer.

Social map training

"Everyone has questions about the social map […] but that's always such a monster, I think, a social map, that often changes, you may have websites but that's not up to date, that's not workable. So, we built our own social map from our own experience. We say very clearly 'this is really just an illustration' and we used themes, a bit forced. And we have given it twice or three times now to our mentors. We also make it compulsory for them to receive the training so that they have something to hold on to, so that they have some orientation about the landscape in [city], which partners are most inquired about and/or have enough expertise according to us to assist this target group. […] They don't have to know it by heart, but we do think it's important that they've heard of them, that they know where to find their resources, that they can refer to that overview document and that they do put some effort into that as a mentor." (Leuven)

In addition to these more common training sessions, programs sometimes offer one-off sessions organized by external partners or to address a specific need that is communicated by mentors. Examples include a session with the public employment service, an information session about the Public Centre for Social Welfare, a session on the psychological well-being and needs of refugees, and a session on volunteering with newcomers during the corona pandemic. Other common topics addressed in trainings are empowerment and diversity.

Training sessions are most effective when they are interactive. Rather than simply sharing information, programs try to engage mentors and give them opportunities to share their input and experience throughout the session. Alternating between providing information and moments of exchange tends to be most effective. Trainings usually include case examples to get a discussion going about how to approach a situation or problem. The interaction between mentors that stems from this is an important part of the training and may also help to create a group feeling.

To keep mentors engaged, training sessions usually include many different visuals such as video clips, photos, and other images. Rather than explaining a topic, the coordinator or organizer of the training might show a video clip that illustrates the topic and ask the group to discuss it among themselves.

7.2.1.2 Organisation of the training

Social mentoring programs usually offer training sessions to mentors though their approach differs. One recurring point of consideration mentioned by program coordinators is whether trainings should be voluntary or mandatory. In practice, participation is almost always voluntary though some programs require mentors to attend specific trainings such as one program which organizes a mandatory training on the social map of the city. In order to be a good mentor, the coordinators of the program consider it necessary for mentors to know the various organizations and services throughout the city that could be beneficial to the mentee. However, in general, mentor trainings in social mentoring programs are voluntary.

Most coordinators want to maintain the voluntary and informal character of their programs and do not want to impose too many responsibilities and expectations on the mentors. Nevertheless, several coordinators references the Armen Tekort approach as an interesting alternative. Armen Tekort is a non-profit organization that connects disadvantaged residents (mentees) with advantaged residents (mentors) in order to lift them out of their disadvantaged position. Mentors are required to educate themselves through various trainings before they are matched to a disadvantaged person for a two-year mentoring period. Trainings are thus not only mandatory but also primarily take place before the mentoring, and even the matching, starts. While several coordinators of social mentoring programs for newcomers show interest in this approach, they prefer to maintain the more informal, accessible character of their programs.

An example from practice

"Sometimes we have the feeling that we might not be there enough for our mentors, as in that it might be a bit too noncommittal. We have already thought about that a lot because, for example, you also have Armen Tekort, which is also a mentoring project, but it has quite a high threshold because to become a mentor, you first must follow a very long training course, followed by many intervisions, so the guidance is very intensive. I think that is very interesting for the mentors, but it does make it a high threshold to become a mentor. And that might also put off many people. On the other hand, we think it is nice that we do not have such a high threshold and they have a lot of freedom, we want to maintain this low threshold to attract as many volunteers as possible, but that is a difficult balance." (Fedasil Kapellen)

In most social mentoring programs for newcomers, trainings are offered throughout the mentoring period. Some also incorporate some training elements into their info session or have one mandatory training session such as the social map training, which is offered at the start of the mentoring period so that mentors can use the knowledge to improve their support of the mentee. According to one of the coordinators, requiring volunteers to participate in the trainings becomes more difficult by the time they have already started their mentoring relationship. By offering training sessions before the mentoring starts, programs can easily make them obligatory for participation.

Since most trainings offered by social mentoring programs are voluntary, the frequency is largely determined by participants. Programs usually offer several training options throughout the mentoring period. They will email a list of options to the mentors for which they can register if they are interested.

An example from practice

"We are still trying to figure out what you can ask your mentors to do, because that is a volunteer and we don't want to bombard them with training and peer coaching and another meeting and another fun activity, because they already have their weekly or fortnightly meetings with their newcomer, so I find that a difficult balancing act. […] We don't want to make it too heavy but of course, you want them to do their mentoring work properly."

Programs either organize the training sessions themselves, promote the training sessions offered by partners or other organizations, or use a combination of their own and external trainings. While one program organizes its own training session developed by the program coordinator, discussing topics such as intercultural communication and life in the reception center, several other programs promote training sessions offered by the national Agency for Integration and Civic Integration or their municipality.

Promoting external training sessions has its benefits. Developing training sessions requires a lot of time, which coordinators are usually lacking. Not having to devote time to develop trainings also leaves more time for follow-up, which some coordinators consider more important to a successful mentoring program than formal trainings. Trainings offered by external organizations also benefit from years of expertise and experience, something which can not be rivalled by program coordinators who, if they organize trainings, do so in addition to all their other responsibilities. Since the trainings are offered by external organizations, participants may also interact with volunteers from other mentoring or volunteer programs, which could broaden their horizon and lead to new insights that can benefit them in their own mentoring relationship.

One of the main benefits of developing your own training sessions is that the training is more program-specific. Coordinators can directly address the concerns and questions of their volunteers and focus on the topics most relevant for their mentoring program. Some trainings, such as the social map training, are so context- and program-specific that no other organization can develop it. When trainings are organized by the program and only accessible to its own volunteers, it can also function as an informal follow-up moment. This provides another opportunity for the coordinator to hear from their volunteers and get a sense of how they are getting along. Since most mentors will usually hang around after the training and have a drink together, this also provides

another opportunity for the mentors to interact and contributes to the community feeling that some programs strive for.

An example from practice

"The advantange, in my opinion, is that if you keep it within your own program, it can also be a meeting point where the mentors can see us again, where they can also meet mentors from other refugees and so on. So, if you keep it purely as training, I think you can open it up to other volunteer profiles as well, but we always like to make it a bit of a meeting, intervision, conversation moment as well, so that it doesn't have to be so demarcated. I see that now, too, when we do the social map training, you always have mentors who hang around after the training, also on the screen. And that's quite nice, you are of course chatting digitally, but I think that is also what the mentors need most, perhaps even more than a training professional at the front giving his methods and information. Sometimes they just want to have a chat with another mentor or hear how it's been going. So, we mainly focus on meetings and exchanges because there is a lot of expertise and experience within your group itself, I think it is interesting that you can also use that somewhere or other." (Leuven)

An interesting alternative is to work together with other mentoring or volunteering programs to organize a shared training offer. According to one coordinator, volunteers in different programs often have very similar questions and concerns. Instead of each program developing its own trainings, they can gather their experience and know-how and develop training sessions available to volunteers of all participating programs. For some topics it might be more relevant to cooperate with other mentoring programs whereas other topics might benefit from cooperation with programs that target the same group, in this case newcomers. In addition to offering program-specific trainings, programs could then benefit from shared trainings on topics such as setting boundaries or the relationship with professionals.

In developing a mentor training program, some coordinators suggest asking input from mentors. What would they like to know more about? What do they struggle with? Mentor training sessions are to help the mentors in their mentoring relationship with the mentee. Instead of assuming what mentors need or should know, it is more efficient to ask them and adjust the training program accordingly. This also helps to keep the mentors engaged since the topics are not only more interesting as they directly address their own concerns, but mentors also feel heard and included in the decision-making process, giving them a sense of agency.

An example from practice

"We want to work on a personal basis because during the last discussion evening with the mentors, we asked them: 'we are developing a training program, which themes would you like to see addressed?'and while we were actually thinking of themes such as intercultural communication, they were thinking more of the workings of a reception center, so just very concretely: what does a day here look like? So, we will add that as well. We do want to work on a personal basis and at the request of the volunteers." (Fedasil Kapellen)

While most programs offer training sessions to their mentors, they do not provide similar learning opportunities for their mentees. Some are considering doing so in the future. Especially the training session on setting boundaries is considered equally relevant for both mentors and mentees. However, organizing training sessions for mentees is considerably more challenging since the group speaks a multitude of languages and has various levels of proficiency in the local language or common languages such as English. To avoid such difficulties, most programs choose to share the most relevant information for the mentee during the intake as opposed to organizing a separate training session.

Case Armen Tekort

Armen Tekort is a non-profit organization in Antwerp, Belgium that connects disadvantaged residents (mentees) with advantaged residents (mentors) for a period of two years. The goal of the mentoring project is to lift mentees out of their disadvantaged position.

While multiple social mentoring programs for newcomers express interest in Armen Tekort's approach to training and support, none have implemented similar approaches. Programs do not want to overburden mentors with too many requirements and responsibilities and generally prefer to maintain the informal character of their programs. Nevertheless, almost every coordinator referenced the organization and looked to it for inspiration. It is thus an approach worth exploring.

Armen Tekort offers the following training and support to their mentors:

1) **E-learning:** the organization offers ten online courses via a digital E-learning platform. Mentors can finish the courses at their own pace.
2) **Workshops:** every learning module is matched to an interactive workshop with a focus on the acquisition of skills. Mentors have to complete the workshops before they can start their mentoring. Workshops are organized into four phases:
   - Insight: mentors learn about disadvantaged people, explore the network of aid organizations in Antwerp, and get to know the Armen Tekort coaches.
   - Connection: this phase focuses on the relationship between mentor and mentee. Mentors learn about their worldview and biases and how they affect behavior and thinking.
   - Empowerment and networking: mentors learn about empowerment and three of its aspects: strenghts, self-reliance, and connection to a network.
   - Mentoring: together with an actor (who takes on the role of a mentee), a coach (a mentor who has finished a successful mentoring relationship), and an expert trainer, mentors practice the skills they learned in the workshops.
3) **Intervisions:** once the mentoring relationship starts, mentors participate in regular intervisions. Under the guidance of a professional coach, mentors refect on issues they encounter in their mentoring relationship. According to the organization, such sessions can create new insights and change attitudes among mentors.
4) **Knowledge database:** the E-learning platform used for the online courses also includes a knowlegde database that mentors can use. The database includes a social map of Antwerp that lists all the aid organizations that the mentor can turn to with specific requests.

7.2.2 Peer learning

Most mentoring programs organize peer learning sessions for mentors. While training is more formal and structured, peer learning takes place in a more informal setting and tends to be more focused on the immediate concerns and experiences of the mentors. However, in practice, trainings and peer learning sessions may overlap with some programs organizing their own training sessions that allow for considerable interaction and peer learning while others include training elements in their peer learning sessions.

To organize a peer learning session, coordinators will usually send invitations to all active mentors. The frequency of peer learning sessions ranges from one session during the mentoring period (e.g. 6 months) to every month. Some programs have a fixed schedule while others organize a session when they recognize a need for it among mentors. Participation is usually voluntary. Ideally, the peer learning session takes place in-person but during corona, some programs organized Zoom sessions. While usually less frequented by mentors, the online sessions were appreciated as it was usually one of the few opportunities to share their experiences as a mentor and talk with other mentors since group activities (and some trainings) were cancelled.

Peer learning sessions can be approached in roughly two ways. First, some programs approach peer learning sessions as very informal meetings or get-togethers where all attendees will be asked to share their recent experiences and possible problems, questions, and advice. The conversation is supposed to flow naturally without too much interference from the coordinator or other staff present. The second option is more common and requires a bit more organization on the part of the coordinator. The session might have a theme such as 'setting boundaries' that the exchange will focus on. The theme is usually one that many mentors struggle with and/or that the coordinator has received a lot of questions about recently. They might also directly ask for input from mentors to decide on the topic more collaboratively.

An example from practice

When the COVID-19 restrictions came into place, Compagnons Oostende introduced a new peer learning system called 'buddy swap': "with a group of 4-5 we do a Zoom session. If we hear that there's someone with a particular problem for example 'I have trouble setting boundaries' and we have heard that that's going super well for someone else or doesn't, then we invite those 3 or those 4 people and then we have an intervision around that. […] Before, that happened spontaneously during the group gatherings or activities but now we thought it would be a good idea if we just put two people with the same problem together."

Several coordinators stressed the importance of involving mentors in the agenda-setting process. If peer learning sessions are planned without inquiring 1) whether there is a need for it among mentors and 2) what their needs and questions are, there is a considerable risk that mentors will not engage or not attend the session. If only a small group of mentors is interested in an exchange or the coordinator notices that a few mentors struggle with a similar problem, they could opt to organize an exchange between those few mentors rather than with the whole group. One of the programs refers mentors who struggle with a specific issue to another mentor who has previously dealt with the same issue and can offer some concrete guidance. This not only allows for more direct assistance, but it also alleviates the coordinator and contributes to a community feeling among volunteers.

During group peer learning sessions, some programs use cases to illustrate specific situations and conflicts that may occur. These are real life examples that mentors will be presented with. A case example used during one of the sessions is: 'your mentee is joined by a friend. They brought a stack of invoices. You refer to the social worker, but they keep insisting. Some of the invoices are already late. What do you do?' Usually, there is no one right answer but the conversation and exchange between attendees are what matters. By allowing candidates to share their views and discuss the best course of action, the program can frame their expectations and set the stage for a succesful mentoring relationship.

Using case examples

The social mentoring program of the municipality of Leuven uses several case examples during their introduction to the social map of Leuven, of which one is outlined here:

"You are the mentor of a Somali family: a father, mother and three children, and a fourth on the way. After a long family reunification procedure, they are finally back together. A lot still has to be arranged, especially for the children. The family has financial problems and lives in a small apartment in a very bad condition. Apparently, they rent from a slumlord.

Discuss in group:

> *How do you approach this? What organisations do you and/or your newcomer look to for information or support?*
> *What if there is no immediate solution? How can you support your newcomer in the meantime, which organisations can you contact?"*

According to most social mentoring programs, offering exchange opportunities between mentors can help to create a group feeling among participants of the program and keep mentors motivated and committed to the program. Mentors who are struggling in their mentoring relationship can vent and share their experience with like-minded people and receive advice. Even just hearing that others are struggling with the same issues can be comforting. Peer learning sessions also provide another informal follow-up opportunity for the coordinator.

Benefits of peer learning

A former mentor of Compagnons benefitted from peer learning sessions: "you hear what other people are doing and you feel like 'I have the same problem' or 'I have wondered about that too'. You get the motivation and the drive also from the fact that 'yes we are all doing a bit of the same', it is different for everyone but there was also someone there who said, 'I have done this and this with my mentee' and I thought 'that is a cool idea'! So, it can actually give you a lot of cool ideas."

Benefits of peer learning

"We see that a lot of mentors benefit from seeing each other, even if it is digitally during a training, that a more experienced mentor says, 'I always do it this way', that's a bit the idea of peer learning but also informal, just some chats, getting to know each other. We want to invest in that family feeling, that people can also ask each other questions in a Facebook group for example or that someone says: next week there's a theatre performance for non-native speakers, I'm going with my newcomer, do any other mentors feel like joining? And we can also promote these things a bit more because we really believe that they learn the most from each other, they just need to be able to vent, to ask each other for advice." (Leuven)

7.2.3 Group activities

In addition to training and peer learning sessions, most programs organize at least one group activity per mentoring period or, if programs do not have a set duration, at least once or twice a year. Group activities are different from training and peer learning in that they are usually available to all participants of the program and are entirely casual in nature. Common examples include dinners, walks, creative activities, sports activities such as a football game, cultural activities such as going to the opera, museum, festival or performance, going to the zoo, game nights, or participation in larger events such as World Refugee Day. Some programs also promote activities organized by the municipality or other local organizations.

Table 11 Common group activities

Leisure activities e.g., dinners, game nights
Family activities e.g, going to the (petting) zoo
Acive activities e.g., going for a walk
Cultural activities e.g., going to the opera, museum
Creative activities e.g, windpainting
Special events e.g., World Refugee Day

While most group activities organized by mentoring programs are informal leisure activities, some programs also organize or invite participants to other activities such as discussion tables for informal language learning. These are often organized by the organization or municipality and accessible to the general public. During such sessions, participants will talk with each other, sometimes aided by specific themes or questions. In general, such sessions are not frequented as much as other activities.

Involving participants in group activities

According to a mentor, activities could be improved if active involvement from participants in the organisation of activities was encouraged: "I think they could ask more from the group, 'does anyone feel like organizing something?' And maybe that's an evening of bowling, someone who wants to give a cooking workshop, someone who plays Djembé and wants to do something with that, or someone who is a member of a theater group or dance company; that it can come more from the group and it's more diverse and less forced. […] I think that's more important than sitting around a table with a whole group and each of you taking turns to say something. I understand the principle of it but it doesn't provide much dynamism and highlights so I think it would be more interesting if they left it open: what do you want to do? Does anyone have an idea? And then the program finds a location and time and sends out the mail but you or a few people take care of the content." (Mentor)

Involving participants in the organization of activities is not only suggested by some participants but also encouraged by some coordinators. For example, one program organized a Syrian night with food, drinks and music with the help of some of its mentees. Coordinators stress the importance of group activities as a means of stimulating a feeling of community among mentors and mentees and keeping people engaged in and committed to the program. Involving participants in the organization of activities could contribute to this even more.

Participation in group activities is encouraged but voluntary. Mentors and mentees are usually informed about activities at the beginning of their mentoring relationship, for example during their first meeting or info session, or they receive the information via email or an activity calendar. Most programs allow participants to bring their family members to group activities.

While most programs organize the group activities themselves, coordinators often struggle to maintain a reliable offering of activities due to time constraints. One of the mentoring programs has tried to solve this by partnering with organizations who have more experience with organizing activities. They have teamed up with three organizations, a non-profit that organizes activities focused on the local sea and coast, a museum which already organizes many different group activities, and the local petting zoo. An added benefit in working with such organizations is that they all organize activities that both parents and children can participate in, an important criteria when trying to engage a large and diverse group of mentors and mentees.

Most programs tend to focus on activities for all participants and activities specifically for mentors (trainings, peer learning) with activities for newcomers being limited or non-existent. One program does organize a recurring activity which is quite unique. Intended as a way to engage newcomers who have not been paired with a mentor yet, FC [program name] is a football team entirely composed of newcomers. They train every week with a trainer who is also a newcomer. They compete in matches and have even played against a team from a prison in the region. According to the coordinator, FC [program name] is a great way for newcomers of different background to interact with one another, to develop relationships and to help each other if needed.

7.3 Recommendations

- ✓ Programs should provide training for mentors. They can organise trainings themselves and/or seek partnerships with organisations that offer relevant mentor or volunteer training sessions.
- ✓ Programs should require mentors to attend pre-match training sessions on topics that the mentor should know about before starting their mentoring relationship (e.g., program-specific trainings such as the social map of the city).
- ✓ Programs should provide an additional selection of voluntary post-match training sessions for topics that could benefit mentors but are not pivotal to the success of the mentoring relationship.
- ✓ Programs should communicate the available training sessions to mentors at the start of the mentoring period.
- ✓ Programs should ensure that their trainings are interactive, supported by visual tools and case studies, and offer concrete advice that the mentors can use in their own mentoring relationship.
- ✓ Programs should organise regular peer learning sessions for mentors to exchange tips and experiences. Participation should be voluntary.
- ✓ Programs should ask input from paritcipants when organising program-specific training and peer learning sessions so that their needs guide the agenda and discussion.
- ✓ Programs should organise at least one voluntary group activity per mentoring period.
- ✓ Programs should involve participants in the organisation of the group activities.
- ✓ Programs should allow participants to bring family members to the group activities.
- ✓ Programs may explore opportunities for cooperation with other organisations who are better equipped to organise fun group activities.

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