

INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCES IN SOCIAL, HEALTH, EMPLOYMENT AND INTEGRATION SERVICES

An Immigrant Woman's Perspective

A Product Thesis in Collaboration with Neighbourhood Mothers Project at
Nicehearts ry

Michelle Kaila
Thesis, Spring 2017
Diaconia University of Applied Sciences
Helsinki
Degree Programme in Social Services
Bachelor of Social Services (UAS)

"What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another."

Henry David Thoreau

ABSTRACT

Kaila, Michelle. Intercultural Experiences in Social, Health, Employment and Integration Services in Finland: An Immigrant Woman's Perspective. Helsinki, Spring 2017. 45 pages plus appendix. Language: English. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, Degree Programme in Social Services, focus in Community Development. Degree: Bachelor of Social Services.

This product thesis, in the form of a booklet, is a compilation of various experiences in intercultural communication during the provision of social, health, employment and integration services in Finland. It aims to serve as a resource to encourage reflection and introspection on intercultural communication for service professionals and social service students in Finland, as well as for the immigrant women of the Neighbourhood Mothers project, in their work.

The 51-page booklet, in Finnish language, is based on group and individual interviews of immigrant women who are participating in the Neighbourhood Mothers project at Nicehearts ry, and of three service professionals working in Finland.

The report outlines the process of carrying out the product-based thesis in collaboration with Neighbourhood Mothers project at Nicehearts ry, and includes relevant theoretical background and thematic research that is based on the information gathered during the interview process. Both the information provided in the report and the experiences in the booklet illustrate the importance of the active dismantling of prejudices, for both eradicating discrimination, and to foster respectful communication in intercultural interactions during service provision.

The intention and concept behind the booklet is that service professionals and social service students, by reading the immigrant women's stories, might identify with some of the elements conveyed in their experiences, facilitating an empathetic connection, whereby stereotypes and the consciousness of differences can be diminished. Furthermore, in reading both the service users' and service professionals' experiences, the readers may become aware of other perspectives to situations with regard to intercultural communications in their work.

Keywords: intercultural communication, immigrant, refugee, social services, health services, employment services, integration services, Nicehearts

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 BACKGROUND	2
2.1 A Changing Finland	3
2.2 Nicehearts Ry and Neighbourhood Mothers Project.....	7
2.3 Thesis Development Background	10
3 LITERATURE REVIEW AND REFLECTIONS	11
3.1 Language Learning and the Integration Process	13
3.2 Migration Stress and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.....	14
3.3 Cultural and Religious Differences.....	17
3.3.1 Family and Childcare from a Cultural Perspective	18
3.3.2 Cultural Differences and Healthcare	20
3.4 Stereotypes and Prejudice.....	21
4 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRODUCT	22
4.1 Aim of the Product	22
4.2 Data Collection and Neighbourhood Mothers as the Study Group.....	23
4.3 Planning and Process	25
4.3.1 Interview Questions.....	29
4.4 Product Format	30
4.5 Presentation and Distribution of the Product	31
5 DISCUSSION	33
5.1 Ethics	33
5.2 Challenges	34
5.3 Limitations of the Study.....	36
5.4 Professional Development.....	37
6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	38
REFERENCES	41
APPENDIX 1: DISCUSSION GROUP PLAN	46

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, Finland's immigrant population has grown and will continue to grow. How we welcome and interact with our new fellow Finns will be a significant factor in their perception of their new home, and will also influence the way in which they build their new lives. Many of them are asylum seekers or refugees, having fled war and persecution. They have been forced to leave their families and homes, and many are carrying traumas that are invisible to the eye. I have spoken with quite many of them in my work over the years, and have heard stories that are too sad, too horrific, to be retold. The bottom line is, every single person has their own story, and each person deserves to be treated fairly and respectfully.

Discrimination can take many forms, and is a common problem not only in Finland, but in countries all over the world. During my time living in Finland, I have also heard of, experienced, and been witness to instances of discriminatory behaviour of professionals in the educational, health, employment, and social service sectors with regard to the manner of treatment of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. For many years I have been considering what could be an effective way to open a discussion on these issues, and, if possible, to find ways to constructively address the problems.

This thesis is intended to serve as a resource for reflection on some of the intercultural experiences of immigrant women as service users, for the purpose of giving them a 'voice', obtaining a better understanding of some of the challenges to the effective provision of social, health, employment and integration services for immigrants in Finland, and hopefully, to positively influence the development of these services.

This is a product-based thesis, made in collaboration with the participants of Neighbourhood Mothers project at Nicehearts ry, based in Vantaa, Finland. The product, in the form of a booklet, is a compilation of the experiences of some of the Neighbourhood Mothers in social, health, employment and integration services in Finland. The booklet also contains a section with the experiences and advice of three service professionals who have been working with immigrants and refugees in Finland for many years. The booklet is in Finnish language, as it is primarily intended for the use of service professionals and social service students in Finland, who are mainly operating in Finnish language.

The report will begin with a presentation of the concept and background of the thesis study, including a brief examination of the shifting demographics in Finland with regard to foreign population. The next section will consist of an analysis of certain themes, chosen both according to and in relation with the topics provided by the Neighbourhood Mothers during the interview and group discussion process. The remainder of the report will further elaborate on the product aims, the process of development of the thesis product, and its presentation and distribution. It will conclude with a description of the challenges and limitations to the thesis study, and a summary of my own professional development during the thesis process.

2 BACKGROUND

This section includes an investigation into statistical changes in foreign population in Finland over the last four decades, related societal attitudes, possible ramifications of such attitudes with regard to the quality of service provision, as well as a description of the organization and project with which I collaborated during the thesis process.

2.1 A Changing Finland

In *Cultural Diversity of Finland*, it is stated that the "image of Finland as a culturally and ethnically homogenous nation is erroneous", arguing that Finland's original minorities had already included Swedish speakers, the Sami indigenous people, the Romani, as well as several smaller ethno-cultural and religious groups, since the nineteenth century (Raento & Husso 2002, 151). However, until relatively recently in Finland's history, Finland had remained relatively isolated from international immigration (Korkiasaari & Söderling 1998, 14; cited in Raento & Husso 2002, 158), partly due to its geographical location and a non-colonialist history (Raento & Husso 2002, 158).

In the early 1990s, Finland's policies had become more receptive and clearly defined, and by the end of 2000 there was a marked increase in immigration (see Figure 1), with the foreign population reaching 91,000 (1.8%), and the number of refugees rising to 18,500 (Valtavaara 2001; cited in Raento & Husso 2002, 159).

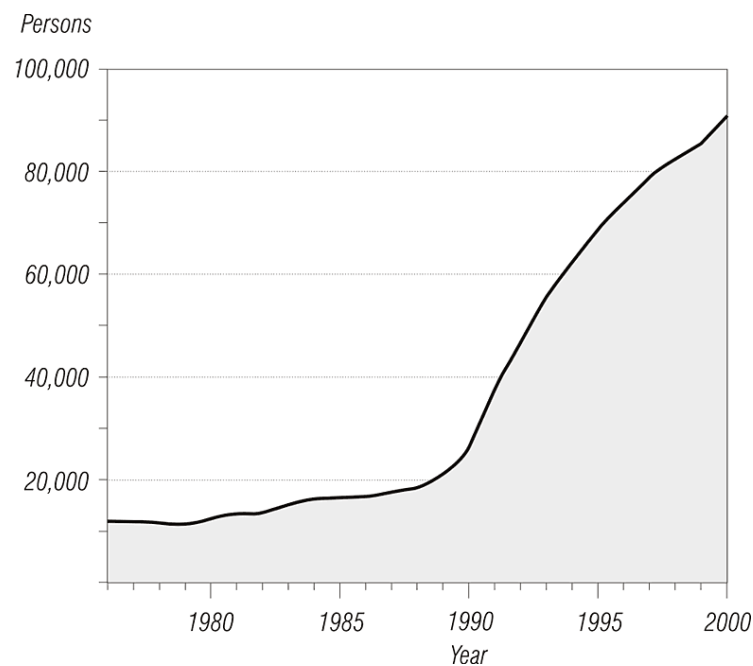
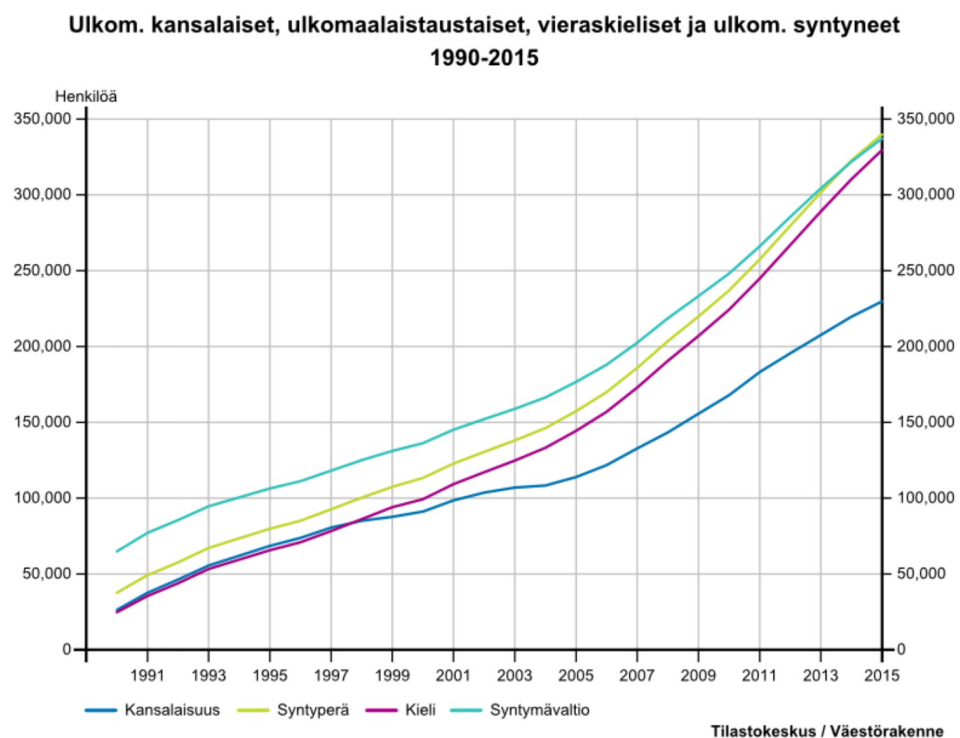


Figure 1. Foreigners in Finland, 1976-2000 (STV 1999: 88, 2000: 86; Valtavaara 2001) (cited in Raento & Husso 2002, 159).

Although the above changes in population were at the time quite significant in Finnish context, the figures were still on the low end of the scale within the European Union (Raento & Husso 2002, 159). Currently, in the European Union, Finland's immigration numbers continue to sit in the lower percentage.

According to Statistics Finland, at the end of 2015 there were 339,925 persons with foreign background living in Finland - 6.2 percent of the entire population. There were 286,803 persons of first generation with foreign background, i.e. born abroad, and 53,122 persons of second generation with foreign background, i.e. born in Finland. (Statistics Finland 2016.)

The following chart from the Statistics Finland (2016) website breaks down the numbers of persons who: are foreign nationals (ulkom. kansalaiset), have a foreign background (ulkomaalaistaustaiset), are foreign language speakers (vieraskieliset), and are foreign-born (ulkom. syntyneet), continuing from the mark of the initial surge of immigrant population in the 1990s that was illustrated in the previous chart, to 2015.



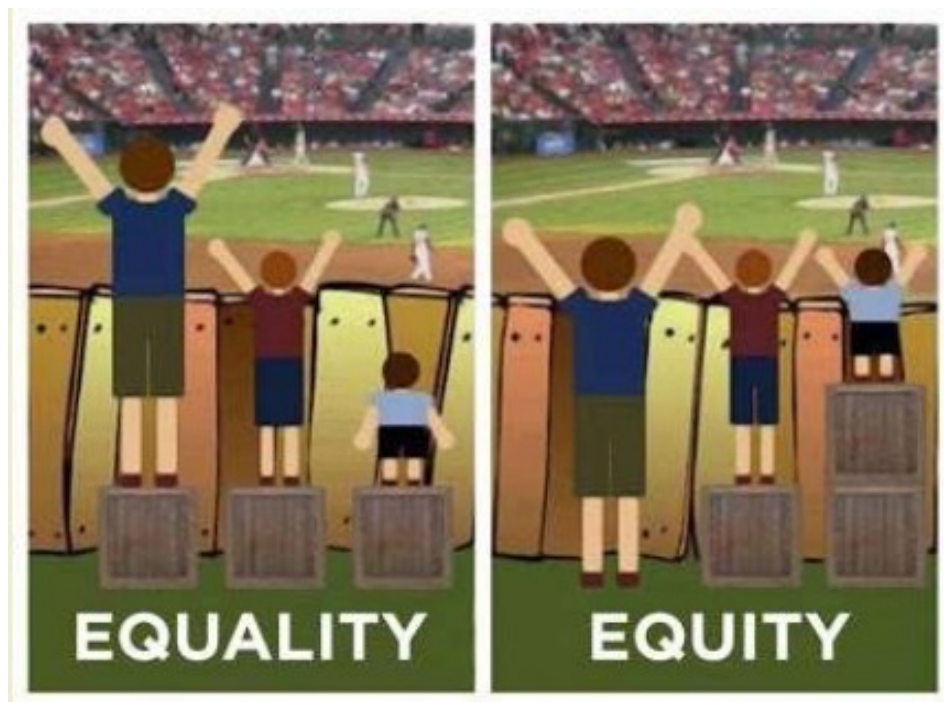
If we consider the information and statistics mentioned in this section, there has been on one side, a significant increase in foreign population in the Finnish context, and on the other, slowly developing immigration policies. In addition to this, there have been seemingly ambivalent attitudes towards immigration. These have been expressed by members of the general population, people belonging to anti-immigration groups, as well as by many actors on the political stage, through various outlets and on a wide spectrum ranging from 'opinions', economical concerns for the country, to hate speech and racist attacks. According to researchers at the Police University College, the number of hate crimes reported have been increasing, with most incidents occurring in southern Finland, and 80% racist in nature. The police also mention that most hate crimes are not reported. (YLE 2016.)

Despite the fact that at the present time there appears to be a wavering of both general and political opinion with regard to immigration policies, there has been a significant increase in asylum seekers in Finland over the last few years, both due to the refugee crisis and work or family related immigration, and it is probable that the immigrant population in Finland will continue to grow at a faster rate than it has in the past. It follows that there will continue to be an increased need for development in intercultural communication in services, not only with regard to language and an increased demand for translators, but also for culturally sensitive service provision. Emotional intelligence, for example, is something which is not always taken into consideration when discussing the quality of service provision, but it is perhaps important to broaden our vision in the face of such societal changes as those occurring now. Hafford-Letchfield and Gallop describe the main features of emotional intelligence as "self-awareness, other awareness, self-management and relationship management" (2012, 28). They also critically discuss "applying industrial models of management to social care and social work", and the managerialism approach, which can neglect the "importance of the people side of organizations", and "privileges administrative requirements over reflective practice" (2012, 27).

According to Furze and Gale (1996; cited in Hafford-Letchfield & Gallop 2012, 28), "the starting point in developing managerial effectiveness must lie in developing our understanding, not only of the way other people behave and interact, but of ourselves." Although this is discussed in a managerial sense, it can quite relevantly be applied to the work of social service professionals, especially those who are working with service users with different cultural backgrounds.

In addition to the challenges related to cultural differences that we, as service professionals, will encounter with regard to intercultural communication, it is also not anymore possible to ignore that quite many of the asylum seekers who will be settled in Finland are victims of trauma, and a "one-size-fits-all" attitude may not anymore be sufficient, nor effective, in achieving true equality in service provision.

With reference to the following much-used illustration, it is essential for service providers to understand what true equality, or equity, means, and how it can be put into practice during service provision, both in the structure of the services,



and during intercultural communication. Whereas equality does not necessarily consider differences such as those of race, gender, social class and ethnicity, equity deals with those and other differences, as well as taking into consideration "the fact that this society has many groups in it who have not always been given equal treatment and/or have not had a level field on which to play" (Shapiro & Skeptovich 2005; cited in Shapiro & Gross 2008, 119). Therefore, to truly consider others in an equal manner and to act with equity may in certain situations stipulate offering "unequal treatment for those who have been disadvantaged" (Shapiro & Gross 2008, 119), such as is portrayed in the above illustration.

2.2 Nicehearts Ry and Neighbourhood Mothers Project

Neighbourhood Mothers at Nicehearts ry is the working project with which I have conducted my thesis. The following is based on information gathered during my two internships at Neighbourhood Mothers, of 7 and 10 weeks duration respectively.

Nicehearts ry is an NGO that was established in 2001, and which has been involved in various national and international projects in Finland. The goal of the organization is to "support the community's self-reliance, equality and promotion and production of multicultural activities for girls and women." The aims of the activities at Nicehearts are to create long-term networks and to provide a place for girls and women of different cultures and ages to meet on a daily basis. Nicehearts' mission is to "enable women's active participation in the society, to promote gender equality and to strive towards the betterment of girls' and women's lives and living conditions in Finland." (Nicehearts n.d..)

Within the Nicehearts' main office in Tikkurila, Vantaa, there are various working models: WahvaNainen (Strong Woman), Tyttöjen Tila (Girl's Space), and Naapuriäidit-hanke (Neighbourhood Mothers project), the latter in which I was

participating during two internships in 2016. Neighbourhood Mothers is a community development model, in which the main objective is to implement on the community level the process of empowerment of women of different ethnic backgrounds, as well as to prevent and combat discrimination in the society. (Nicehearts n.d.)

The idea of Neighbourhood Mothers was born in 2004 in the area of Neukölln in Berlin, Germany, as a grassroots outreach project. It began with twelve Turkish women who participated in the offered training, and from there it developed into a network of over 100 'neighbourhood mothers' of many different nationalities. Today, the Neighbourhood Mothers project model has been successfully reproduced in many countries, including Denmark, and now, in Finland. (Cities of Migration 2013.)

The Neighbourhood Mothers of Finland are women who have had the experience of moving to Finland as adults. They have been learning the language and the various systems of services, are interested to help other women to understand how the society functions in Finland, and to increase awareness of their opportunities to be more involved and integrated into the society. Women of all ethnic backgrounds are participating in Neighbourhood Mothers project, and the only prerequisites are having some knowledge of Finnish language, as well as the desire to help other migrant women.

In the pilot phase of this project, the Neighbourhood Mothers participated in a series of training modules, mainly in Finnish, where they have explored various themes concerning social issues of family and daily life in Finland. Some examples of these training modules have included 'Nutrition and Exercise', 'Sexuality and Relationships', 'Child Raising and Development', 'Youth in Finland', 'Family Services', 'Women's and Citizen's Rights', 'Democracy, Freedom of Speech and Diversity', 'How can I help others?', 'How can I take care of myself?', and 'Communication Skills', among others. The project has continued with twice-

monthly peer support group meetings for the Neighbourhood Mothers in Vantaa and Espoo.

The Neighbourhood Mothers project workers are Meg Sakilayan-Latvala, the Project Co-ordinator, who is also a psychologist, and Tanja Gråsten, the Project Worker for Vantaa and Espoo, who is also a nurse and a socionom. Niina Kupiainen is the Project Worker for Lappeenranta. Many students, from both language schools, as well as from various Universities of Applied Sciences, have been working as interns in the Neighbourhood Mothers project.

The co-operation partners for Neighbourhood Mothers project have included City of Espoo, City of Vantaa, Monaliiku ry, HIV Support Centre, Pakolaisapu, Kulttuurikameleontit ry, Tyttötyö, Mielenterveysseura, Monikanaiset, Moniheli, WahvaNainen, and others, also depending on the area where the training has been held.

There are many different types of services available in each city, provided by public, private, and third sector organizations. However, a common challenge many of these organizations have is making their services known to people in the communities. An important role of the Neighbourhood Mothers project in the service sector is to build bridges between these organizations and service users. This is accomplished by first educating the participants on the available services, who then become part of a network that has the capacity to empower other immigrant women with the same knowledge they have gained, as well as by referencing their own personal experiences of navigating the system in Finland.

In each of the areas where trainings are held, the Neighbourhood Mothers have learned of the particular services available in their own local communities, and so are able to act as contacts for other immigrant women in the same areas. Additionally, some of the training sessions have been arranged so that the Neighbourhood Mothers were able to influence change in their local communities,

by providing feedback and ideas to representatives of local services in person, through discussions.

The pilot phase of the Neighbourhood Mothers project was completed in December 2016. The project received funding for its continuation, and has expanded also to Helsinki. The project phase started in January 2017, and continues until December 2018.

2.3 Thesis Development Background

As mentioned in the introduction, after living in Finland for many years and having heard and been witness to instances of discrimination of immigrants, the desire had grown in me to find an effective way to open the discussion on the issues concerning intercultural communication in service provision, and to find ways to constructively address the problems. This was one of the main reasons why I decided to study to become a social services worker, and already in my first year I had chosen the topic of my thesis.

Originally, I had decided on a product-based thesis, of which the product would be a guidebook providing tips for improving the cultural competence for service professionals. However, after some reflection, I decided instead to collect and assemble a compilation of immigrants' and service professionals' intercultural communication experiences in social, health, employment and integration services in Finland.

The target group was also initially more broad, and would have included both women and men. However, after some weeks of attending the Neighbourhood Mothers training sessions in the beginning of 2016, Meg-Sakilayan Latvala, the Project Coordinator of Neighbourhood Mothers, and later my internship and thesis supervisor, suggested that the Neighbourhood Mothers could be the target

group for the thesis work. In April 2016, I conducted my first individual interview with a Neighbourhood Mother, for the thesis data collection.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW AND REFLECTIONS

This section consists of various themes, which have been chosen on the basis of the information gathered during the interviews and discussion sessions with the Neighbourhood Mothers and service professionals, including some related thematic and contextual research. The materials in this section that are not linked to some reference are based on my own experience and knowledge.

As mentioned in the introduction of the booklet, most of the experiences of the Neighbourhood Mothers are not happy stories. Many of them, essentially, are the immigrant women's complaints of the manner of treatment received during interaction with service professionals. Some of the experiences are related to the structure of the systems of services, rather than the behaviour of the service professional, and some may be a combination of both. While the main purpose behind this product thesis is not to investigate Finland's service structure as it relates to immigrant service users, this aspect may still be important to consider. Although these may be mistakenly perceived by immigrant service users as acts of discrimination, they may nevertheless be indicative of certain structural inequalities, which service users may be able to perceive as affecting the quality of their lives - their subjective wellbeing - as immigrants in Finland.

I have heard people criticize such complaining of immigrants as being ungrateful. However, if we were to place such voicing of each grievance in a context that considers subjective wellbeing, an "umbrella term used to describe the level of wellbeing people experience according to their subjective evaluations of their

lives" (Diener & Ryan 2009), we might be able to perceive a broader understanding of the individual's situation, and reasoning behind the complaint.

This can also assist in prevent judgements based on assumptions. A common assumption, for example, of those supporting anti-immigration policies is that immigrants are lazy, and they take advantage of the social welfare system.

Some years ago, I had a conversation with an older immigrant woman who was complaining a lot about the difficulties she was having in understanding how to navigate the Finnish bureaucratic system. She had been living in Finland for many years, but did not yet speak Finnish, and she was unemployed. Based on this information, it might be very easy for some to judge her. However, deeper into the conversation, other facts emerged.

She had come to Finland as a refugee, and was without her husband. In order to apply for family reunification, she would need to have work providing a certain amount of income. Most work in Finland requires Finnish language skills. However, as an older person, she was not first on the list of those offered Finnish courses, and there were long queues. She was indeed grateful that she had been able to escape to a safe country, and that her basic needs were being taken care of. However, she was also suffering from high levels of anxiety caused by migration stress and trauma, and she was depressed from the long separation from her husband, family, and home.

Of course, the benefits of we as service professionals understanding a service user's perception of their own wellbeing applies to all service users, and not just immigrants. Increasing our understanding of subjective wellbeing may also provide us with useful information for developing our skills in intercultural communication in our work.

3.1 Language Learning and the Integration Process

"Never make fun of someone who speaks broken English. It means they know another language."

H. Jackson Brown Jr.

Learning the language is often one of the first encounters an immigrant has with Finnish culture. How that culture is presented can shape more than just the language, but also the newcomer's attitude towards the new country, and people.

It is important to also keep in mind that the students in various education centres taking a Finnish language course are adults. If a teacher who is a native Finnish speaker is not aware of how difficult it is for an immigrant to learn the language, he or she may very easily lose patience during teaching. While sometimes it may be a matter of time and resources, it may also be that the worker is not professionally equipped to effectively handle such situations.

Many immigrants whom I have spoken with who have struggled with learning a new language have had the experience of being treated in a condescending or patronizing manner for not speaking their new country's native language properly. This can happen even if the native speaker has a good will and intention, and it is a common mistake to interact with a non-native speaker of a language as if he or she were a child, or a person of low intellectual capacity.

However, considering the experiences of the Neighbourhood Mothers as conveyed in the booklet, one might speculate: would Finnish children in school be treated in such a manner? Would their rights to go to the bathroom denied? Would a teacher dare to grab a child's arm, and pull her forcefully into the classroom? If such behaviour of a teacher would have been heard of in a Finnish elementary school, even if just occasionally, surely it would follow that serious consideration and reform would be required by both parents and the school

administration. It begs the questions: What is the difference in the case of Finnish language school for adult immigrants? Are they not entitled to the same rights as others?

3.2 Migration Stress and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

There is often significant stress and anxiety connected with migrating from one's home country to another. These may include unemployment, separation from families and loved ones, ethnic discrimination, language barriers, among others. (Lehti, Antas, Kärnä & Tuisku 2016, 20.) The degree of migration stress experienced by an individual is influenced by various factors, including whether migration is forced or voluntary, the similarity or dissimilarity of culture in the destination country, and the availability of a social support network, to name a few (Bhugra & Becker 2005, 6).

In the booklet are included a number of experiences regarding Finnish language education for immigrants. Although not all of the immigrants attending Finnish courses are refugees or asylum seekers, due to the recent increase in the amount of migrants arriving illegally in the European Union from across the Mediterranean Sea and through Southeast Europe, in what has been termed the 'migrant crisis', it follows that there will probably continue to be a significant percentage of refugees and asylum seekers participating in Finnish language courses. It is not uncommon for an asylum seeker to be carrying various traumas in addition to general migration-related stress and anxiety. According to an article on the psychosocial impact of detention and deportation, migrants fearing repatriation are more likely to experience psychological distress, acculturation stress and physical health problems (Arbona et al. 2011; Cavazos-Regh, Zayas & Sptiznagel 2007; Hacker et al. 2011; cited in Brabeck, Lykes & Lustig 2013, 2). Additionally, it is likely that many of these students will be suffering from some degree of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

PTSD is a "serious potentially debilitating condition that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a natural disaster, serious accident, terrorist incident, sudden death of a loved one, war, violent personal assault such as rape, or other life-threatening events." Although most people who experience traumas may recover, those with PTSD continue to suffer from severe depression and anxiety even years after the event. Treatments for PTSD include cognitive-behavioral therapy, cognitive therapy, anxiety management, and medication, among others. (Anxiety and Depression Association of America 2016.)

According to a small study conducted at a reception centre for asylum seekers in Finland, 57% of adults had reported being victims of torture, and 12% had been victims of other violence. In a larger population-based study conducted among immigrants in Finland with resident's permits, 78% of Kurdish, 57% of Somali and 23% of Russian respondents reported having been victims of a significant traumatic experience. A third of Kurdish male respondents reported being victims of torture. These two studies revealed a high prevalence of anxiety, depression and PTSD among asylum seekers and refugees in Finland. (Lehti et al. 2016, 17.)

The following are a few relevant quotes and excerpts from the article *The Impact of PTSD on Refugee Language Learners*, which effectively illustrate the reason behind the need for more understanding and informed action concerning how Finnish language education for immigrants is approached by teachers and educational administrators. The countries and languages mentioned will differ from the Finnish context, but similar principles will apply. Additionally, although the focus in this thesis is on adult education, the general information can likely be applied to children and youth.

"A total of 43 articles reviewed between 1988 and 2015 strongly support the hypothesis that PTSD has a direct affect on refugee language learning but that

ESL educators can implement procedures to minimize impediments to learning." (Clayton 2016, 3).

Research has shown that PTSD symptoms, such as difficulties in concentrating, headaches, severe anxiety, memory issues, reluctance to participate verbally, and dissociation, were all directly related to delayed or reduced learning capacity. (Kosa & Hansen, 2006; Santoro, 1997; Ying, 2001; cited in Clayton 2016, 8). A study by of Iraqi refugees resettled in Sweden suggested the of PTSD symptoms to be "inversely associated to the speed of language acquisition", and that "treatment and preventive measures against worsening of PTSD symptoms are important in order to minimize harmful post-migration stress during language learning." (Söndergaard & Theorell 2004; cited in Clayton 2016, 8.) Suggestions of such measures include administrators developing country files, in order to "assist teachers with contextual understanding of refugee experiences while improving cultural sensitivity" (Clayton 2016, 9). Furthermore, "in order to facilitate the learning process, the language learning experience should be made relevant to refugees' lives while respecting learners' distinctive experiences. Refugee learners should be offered opportunities, and encouraged, to contribute their knowledge and skills to the classroom environment. Their culture and linguistic status should be supported, and marginalization should be circumvented through teacher and community support. Pre-migration history should be respected and incorporated into the learning experience as well." (Clayton 2016, 20.)

This above mentioned research clearly illustrates why it is essential for we, as service professionals, to understand the seriousness of PTSD in immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Any one of us may suffer from stress, anxiety or PTSD. However, immigrants with PTSD, and especially those who are refugees and asylum seekers, are also likely to suffer from migration stress, and, living in a foreign country, are often without a social network and the means and tools to be able to access support, in order to address and alleviate their symptoms.

3.3 Cultural and Religious Differences

Cultural competence begins with "understanding your own culture and biases, becoming sensitive to the cultures of others, and appreciating the differences. The next step involves acquiring knowledge and understanding of other cultures, especially their values and beliefs. The final step is to apply that knowledge." (Galanti 2016, 2.)

According to Barrett, when attempting to define culture and explain cultural difference, we encounter certain dangers: "(1) Minimizing the uniqueness of all individuals, (2) stereotyping and creating misguided expectations, and (3) distorting or misinterpreting differences because of ethnocentrism." Keeping this in mind, we should take care in our approach to the study of cultural differences, and not overgeneralize. (Barrett 2014, 224.)

It is important to state here that in the following sections, we are dealing with generalizations. When mentioning cultural differences in Finnish context and that of other countries, it is not a matter of the exception to the rule - in actuality, there is probably no rule, and likely many exceptions. Nevertheless, there may be some general patterns and commonalities that are evident when comparing one culture to another. These may no doubt touch certain stereotypes, but as the novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has said, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." (TEDGlobal 2009.) So here we are dealing with single stories, and their limitations. Although incomplete, they are still valid experiences, representing dilemmas that require our attention, and which we can perhaps learn something from.

3.3.1 Family and Childcare from a Cultural Perspective

Here I will address the topic from the perspective of an immigrant mother, who are the target group of this thesis study, and not in any way to diminish the role or function of the father in a family.

Being a mother is one among many roles a woman may take in her life. The way in which a woman may perform her role as a mother varies from culture to culture, as it does on an individual level. The case that was mentioned in the booklet, of the Finnish language teacher who did not allow one of her students to go home to take care of her sick child, is one example of a cultural variation of approaches to childcare. The mother in this situation was born and raised in a culture where most of the mothers would work at home with their children. In the Finnish context, children are accustomed to more early independence, and so the teacher was likely viewing the situation from this perspective, rather than taking into consideration that the mother might feel differently, due to cultural differences. According to the teacher, the 9 year old girl was old enough to take care of herself. Only when the child called the mother again during class, crying with pain, did the teacher allow the student to leave.

In another situation, I can recall a Finnish teacher explaining to a room full of immigrant students, many of them mothers, that she received a call one day at work and was told that her daughter had a small accident at daycare and needed to be taken to the doctor. The daycare worker had asked the teacher if she wanted to accompany her daughter, and the teacher said that she would not, as she was at work, and suggested that the daycare workers accompany her daughter instead. She then went on to explain about the importance of Finnish working life. The expressions on the faces of the mothers in the class conveyed that this was difficult for them to understand, and conversation after the class confirmed this. Those mothers I had conversed with clearly told that the mother

accompanying the child to the doctor would have been the more natural thing to do.

I have often heard remarks by immigrants living in Finland of contrasts in the family unit here, compared to that of their own countries. In many countries, extended family is considered part of the main family unit, with regular meetings including and going beyond cousins, uncles, and aunts. From multiple discussions in our class group, it was surmised that one of the reasons for less close family units in Finland compared to, for example, those of some countries in Africa, was the availability of a functional social welfare system. In Finland, the State is depended on for social security, in cases when people's basic needs are not being met. Many of my African classmates noted that in the communities where they were born and raised, there was no such social security from the State, and people relied on each other instead - on family, relatives, and friends. On the other hand, whereas in Finland, social welfare is available for all, in some countries, in cases where an individual has a physical or mental disability, or different sexual orientation, they can be excluded from the same family or community that would normally offer social help in times of need. Nevertheless, the lack of a State-based social welfare system in some countries may be one of the reasons for stronger bonds between individuals and extended family. In communities in some African countries, for example, where there may not be childcare available, grandmothers, or other women in the family, may be taking care of babies and children while their mothers are working, the time spent together likely creating deeper relationships between the children and those taking care of them. I elaborate on this point to create a background of understanding the next story.

The case of the Neighbourhood Mother who was not granted a day's sick leave to deal with her intense grief when her grandmother had passed away may suggest a difference in the depth of the relationship related to cultural reasons. It might also illustrate a difference in the ways in which people who lose loved ones

may grieve. In some cultures, people may express emotions, sadness and grief more openly than in others, for various reasons. For example, in cultures that value emotional control, expressiveness can be perceived as instability (Galanti 2015, 213). Keeping this in mind can help us to remember that the bereaved who do not express their sorrowful emotions openly do not necessarily feel less or grieve less, but that the manner in which they grieve, or handle that grief, may be different. Just as in the previously mentioned example of the mother's work life being put above accompanying her the child to the doctor, it does not mean that the mother loves less or cares less, but that there may be a cultural difference in the manner of childcare. Nevertheless, taking the above experiences into consideration, an inappropriate response based on a lack of empathy in such situations can be painful for those suffering. Therefore, more respect and understanding of these cultural differences would be a beneficial component to effective intercultural communication in service provision.

3.3.2 Cultural Differences and Healthcare

This section addresses one of the experiences mentioned in the booklet, where an immigrant woman's need for modesty while being examined by the nurse was not respected. Some patients might be more comfortable wearing a hospital gown during an examination. Female patients may prefer to be treated by a female nurse or doctor. Through observation, it is often possible to understand if the patient is uncomfortable with the manner of treatment during an appointment. This should not just include physical discomfort, but emotional or mental distress, as well.

Although attitudes towards modesty are often thought to be connected to religious beliefs, there are also attitudes that are rooted in culture. In a section titled 'Female Modesty' in the book *Caring for Patients from Different Cultures*, there are described various situations in healthcare provision demonstrating the different cultural attitudes towards female patients being treated by male or

female doctors and nurses, and of undressing in front of others. The author makes a comparison of cultural differences regarding the subject, remarking that many Americans reading these stories might feel surprised by the female modesty of other cultures, while many Europeans would be surprised at the degree of modesty of American woman, in comparison. (Galanti 2015, 140.)

The author also tells of a situation, where a nursing assistant exposed a female patient's chest during an EKG test, causing embarrassment for the patient, who then tried to cover herself. The nursing assistant ignored the patient's discomfort, and told her to keep her hands down. The patient's personal carer, understanding her patient, covered her in a way so that the nursing assistant could still perform the test. After the test, the patient took the personal carer's hand, bowed her head and thanked her for her understanding and response. (Galanti 2015, 140.)

In conclusion, when providing healthcare for persons coming from different cultures, it seems that it would be beneficial for the successful outcome of the interaction to be more observant of the patient's body language, and to ask questions related to the patient's preference in the manner of treatment. This is also confirmed by the experiences related by the health service professional in the booklet.

3.4 Stereotypes and Prejudice

As students in social services, we are taught that we are required to serve individual clients respectfully and with equity of treatment, regardless of our personal beliefs.

In the booklet, the overreaction of the nurse at the health centre to a black woman asking for an HIV test, the implication of an immigrant mother being incapable to care for her child, and the treatment of immigrant students as people of lower capacity or intelligence are all symptoms indicating various degrees of ignorance

and/or hostility. While it is not the intention to create or add to another stereotype when extrapolating on these matters, as mentioned earlier, there are commonalities in these single stories, as well as many of a similar nature that I have heard outside of the group of Neighbourhood Mothers, which indicate serious deficiencies in the service professionals' cultural competence and intercultural communication skills.

Fortunately, through education and other methods and approaches, it is possible to reverse incorrect attitudes and prejudice based on ignorance or stereotypes. It is my experience that community development work that encourages the interaction of people of different ethnicities, cultures, and religious beliefs, can be a powerful vehicle for effecting such change of attitudes, and for developing a deeper and more holistic understanding of people. It was with this interaction in mind, which helped to form the idea for this thesis study.

4 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRODUCT

This section contains a description of the entire process of the thesis product's development, from the initial concept of the product, including methodology, planning, booklet format, presentation and distribution, to the booklet's evaluation.

4.1 Aim of the Product

The intention is that this booklet will serve as a reminder, or tool for reflection for service professionals already with experience of working with immigrants or refugees, and as a source of information to students in social services who wish to work with immigrants and refugees, to further develop their understanding of

intercultural communication in service provision, with an objective to build more constructive and effective intercultural communication skills.

The concept behind the booklet, is that through reading the participants' stories, we can identify similarities in their experiences, facilitating an empathetic connection, whereby stereotypes, and the consciousness of differences can be diminished. Furthermore, in reading both the service users' and service professionals' experiences, we might see that there is another side of a situation, a different perspective - and in 'seeing the other', we can be more prepared to actively dismantle our own prejudices.

4.2 Data Collection and Neighbourhood Mothers as the Study Group

During my second internship at Neighbourhood Mothers, Meg Sakilayan-Latvala encouraged me to write a thesis process blog series for the Neighbourhood Mothers website, for the purpose of assisting my reflective process, and as part of the development of both the thesis report and the product. The following is based on an excerpt from the second article in the series, which I believe effectively illustrates both the concept behind the chosen methods of data collecting, as well as the reason for choosing this particular group for this thesis study.

"What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another."

Henry David Thoreau

Whether consciously or unconsciously, we create divisions in our mind all the time – mentally separating ourselves from others because of perceived differences. Close proximity does not guarantee an understanding in

communication. As Thoreau so aptly put, "... no exertion of the legs can bring two minds nearer to one another." So, if not of the legs, what kind of exertion is needed?

There are so many factors influencing the way in which an individual views the world, and relates to others. However, at the risk of sounding simplistic, there is also a basic human layer that is part of all of us, in that we want to be happy, accepted, respected, loved, and by which we feel pain, sadness, disappointment, frustration, and so on. In the face of seemingly significant differences, it can be easy at times to forget that we share these basic similarities. When we remember this – when we see that the other whom we have mentally separated ourselves from has more similarities with us than we could initially perceive – the differences become less significant as a point of division. A connection is made, or strengthened. Minds are brought nearer one another. To answer the question – I will go so far as to say that the exertion that is needed is that of the heart (or emotional intelligence, if a more academic term is preferred.)

Hearing another's experiences can facilitate the making of these connections and the breaking down of these perceptions of divisions, which can fuel misunderstanding, prejudice, and racism.

This is where our Neighbourhood Mothers come in. The concept behind the Neighbourhood Mothers Project is the training of immigrant women who have been living for some time in Finland to be able to provide assistance for other immigrant women in navigating their local services, and to empower those women, in turn, to assist others.

The aim is that the thesis product can be a source of information that will provide insight into deficiencies in service provision for immigrants in Finland, and by proposing suggestions, be a useful resource for service workers in further developing their own skills in intercultural communication. Although in some

countries, the significance of women as a power within the society is not always visible, the fact is that globally women have been, and in some countries, still are, central to one of the most important roles of raising children - the future adult citizens in the society.

Even though not every Neighbourhood Mother has children, traditionally and historically women have been the main nurturers and the caregivers in the family. While over time, the roles of women in society have expanded and changed, the traditional aspects of one of a woman's roles in her life – that of a mother, is one which is still very essential and influential in the shaping of our society. Therefore, the immigrant mothers of this project, as empowered women whose desire is to influence the system in a concrete and specific way, are a particularly fitting reference group for this study.

Whilst the above sentiments concerning women and motherhood might be criticized as being too traditional in a modern day Finland, we should perhaps take into consideration that the majority of the Neighbourhood Mothers in Finland are hailing from countries where the traditional role of mother is still very strong in their societies. Therefore, to ignore these traditional aspects of motherhood in their lives would be in turn denying these women an inherent and significant part of their cultural and personal identities.

4.3 Planning and Process

The thesis has been carried out utilizing information gathered from individual interviews and peer group discussion sessions, for the purpose of both ascertaining the significant themes related to the immigrant mothers' experiences as service users, as well as exploring together the available tools and methods for effectively managing situations connected to those themes. These were

discussed during the group interview sessions, primarily for the benefit of the participants, and are not included in the report or booklet.

A group discussion, also called a focus group session, is a "form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data" (Kitzinger 1995, 299). This was decided upon as the main method for gathering information, in order to encourage the participants to feel more relaxed by creating an informal conversational environment, and to minimize the possible limitations of both the interviewer and participants operating mainly in a language in which neither are fluent. While this is an effective way to gather information from many participants in one session, it also encourages participants to interact with each other and to share and comment on each others' experiences, which can open up the discussion more than a one-on-one interview.

The group discussion sessions were negotiated with Neighbourhood Mothers Project Coordinator Meg Sakilayan-Latvala and Project Worker Tanja Gråsten, and were planned for three separate peer support group meetings of the Neighbourhood Mothers in Vantaa and Espoo during October and November 2016. Two individual interviews were conducted in person, and one was conducted by e-mail, with Neighbourhood Mothers who consented to be interviewed for this purpose. Additionally, individual interviews were conducted with three social service professionals who have been providing services for immigrants and refugees for many years in Finland. Individual interviews of participants and services professionals, and some of the group discussion meetings were recorded using an iPhone.

The two individual interviews with Neighbourhood Mothers were conducted in person. The first took place in April 2016 in Espoo, and the second in May 2016, in Vantaa. One individual interview with a Neighbourhood Mother was conducted

through e-mail in December 2016. The three interviewees had been suggested from among the Neighbourhood Mothers by Meg Sakilayan-Latvala.

The service professionals were chosen for their long-time work experience with immigrants in Finland. The first interview was conducted in November 2016, with a service professional working for the public sector, in collaboration with an NGO in Vantaa, whose service users consist of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The second interview, also conducted in November 2016, was with a service professional working in an NGO in Vantaa, and the third interview, conducted in January 2017 in Helsinki, was with a service professional working in the public health sector in various cities.

The first discussion group meeting took place at Asukastalo Myyrinki in Vantaa on October 28th, 2016, where there were 5 participants. The second took place at Asukastalo Kylämaja in Espoo on November 1st, 2016, with 15 participants. The third took place at Naisresurssikeskus Pihlaja in Vantaa on November 3rd, 2016, with 5 participants. The time allotted for each meeting was between one to two hours. Each meeting began with an introduction of the thesis topic, and a description of the purpose of the interviews and the product. The participants who agreed to be interviewed were asked to answer the questions on three papers provided. Each paper had a large circle printed on it, where the participants were to write their experiences.

Initially, each of the three pages was intended to be for each service, as mentioned in the interview questions: Social (KELA, Social Office), Health (Health Centre, Maternity and Childcare Clinic), Employment and Integration (Finnish Language Teaching) services. However, during the first group discussion meeting, it was decided to simplify the format of some of the questions, in order to facilitate the process for the participants. Therefore, the first page was intended for positive experiences in the services, the second for negative experiences, and

the third page (without the printed circle) was designated for suggestions of the participants for improvement of the various services.

After writing their experiences for about ten minutes, I asked the participants to write words or phrases, or to draw pictures, describing their feelings at the time of their experience, on the outside of the circle. In the cases where the participants preferred to have their voices recorded, rather than writing, during the discussion session I asked them to tell about their feelings during the negative or positive experiences they had in the various services.

In the Kylämaja group in Espoo, which is a larger group, we divided the participants into three groups. One group was directed by myself, one by Tanja Gråsten, and the last by one of the Neighbourhood Mothers who had volunteered for that purpose.

The 'learning café' method, which was planned for the end of the discussions, where the Neighbourhood Mothers could share their experiences with the group, was not utilized due to time constraints. The 'short relaxation time' that was scheduled in the discussion group plan, was only used for the first session in Vantaa, as in the subsequent meetings, there was not enough time for it.

Initially, I had thought to collect feedback concerning the interview process from the participants. However, due to the nature of the interviews and various challenges, it happened that by the end of the interviews the allotted time had already run out and the participants needed to leave.

With regard to feedback, one very interesting comment came from one of the social service professionals. During the interview, she exclaimed in a surprised manner that she had never before been asked these types of questions before in her over 17 years of working with immigrants. I was also surprised at this, as to me the information and knowledge I received through her conveying her

experiences was particularly interesting and valuable for my own professional development.

After all the interviews were collected, recordings were transcribed, and the experiences written on paper were typed, into Word documents. The information was edited, translated, and proofread by volunteers in collaboration with myself. I have asked a creative friend to do some illustrations for the booklet, with the purpose of enhancing the content, as well as to facilitate the reception of information for the reader.

I received feedback on a regular basis from my thesis supervisors, Meg Sakilayan-Latvala and Marianne Nylund. Meg Sakilayan-Latvala also offered advice on the group discussion plan, and other stages of the thesis process. I also had a number of individual thesis supervision meetings with Marianne Nylund, in person and through e-mail, to answer various questions and concerns during the thesis process.

4.3.1 Interview Questions

The questions, which I had decided upon to be used to initiate discussions in the group and individual interview sessions of the Neighbourhood Mothers include the following:

- 1) What are your experiences in Finland as service users in a) Social Services (KELA, Social Office), b) Health Services (Health Centres, Maternity and Childcare Clinics (Neuvola)) and c) Employment and Integration Services (Finnish language teaching)?

- 2) Is there anything you would change concerning the manner or form in which the services are provided? If yes, what would you like to change, and how?

The questions posed to the service professionals were based on, but not limited to, the following:

- 1) What are the most common challenges in intercultural communication that you face in your work life with service users?
- 2) What have you found to be effective ways or methods of dealing with those challenges?
- 3) If there would be something you would like to communicate to other service professionals with regard to intercultural communication during service provision, what would that be?
- 4) What would you like to communicate to service users with regard to intercultural communication during service provision?

Information related about both positive and negative experiences are utilized in the booklet quotations, in order to illustrate what is and what is not working in service provision from the immigrant mother's perspective, as the service user. The number of interviewees were approximately 25, including the three service professionals. Further details of the group discussion plan can be found in the APPENDIX.

4.4 Product Format

The thesis product is a 50-page booklet with information based on related personal experiences and academic research. The information has been collected throughout a combination of individual interviews and group discussions together with the immigrant mothers involved in the Nicehearts Neighbourhood Mothers project, with the intention of giving an opportunity for the participants to share their individual knowledge and experiences with each other, and at the

same time, providing information which offers a view into service users' experiences at a personal and grassroots level. Additionally, there is a section of the booklet containing information shared from interviews of three service professionals, two from the public sector and one from the third sector, who have been working with immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in Finland. Information from these service professionals has been collected for the purpose of understanding challenges from the perspective of the service provider.

The booklet consists of a table of contents, a foreword, an introduction, a main body, a references page, and an appendix. There are sections under the four main topic headings: Social Services, Health Services, Employment Services, and Integration Services. In each section there are stories or quotations from the Neighbourhood Mothers relating their experiences and ideas, with a subsection in each dedicated to the information and experiences based on the three service professionals' interviews. The information gathered from the Neighbourhood Mothers during the interview sessions has been classified according to the services described in their experiences. In certain sections, relevant excerpts of related research content from the thesis report were included. The booklet text has been translated into Finnish, which is the service provider's main language of operation.

4.5 Presentation and Distribution of the Product

I have been offered the possibility of organizing an information session at Nicehearts, where representatives of various organizations who may benefit from the booklet can be invited. The booklet can also be utilized by the Neighbourhood Mothers, as in their voluntary work, intercultural communication skills are also important. In this way, the thesis product will not only be a way to influence the development of intercultural communication of professional service workers, but

it will also be a tool for them to enhance their own work as Neighbourhood Mothers.

The thesis product will be employed within both Nicehearts and the Neighbourhood Mothers project on various levels. The following are just a few examples, and the ways in which the product may be utilized is not limited to these only. The booklet will be published on *joomag*, an online publishing platform, and available on the Internet by web link, so that it may be distributed easily and in a cost-efficient manner to service providers in other cities. The link to the booklet will be shared with Nicehearts' and Neighbourhood Mothers project's partners, through e-mail, and also on their respective Facebook pages. The experiences of the Neighbourhood Mothers and service professionals presented in the booklet will be used in training sessions both in Neighbourhood Mothers project and in Nicehearts, both on the organization level, and as part of various events organized with other partners. The booklet and its related themes, such as integration and service provision for immigrants, will also be employed for use in a variety of forums that the Neighbourhood Mothers project will be organizing over the next few years in Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo and Lappeenranta.

Additionally, the thesis report and booklet will be utilized as part of the foundation to the project called "Kaupunkisosaalityöllä kohti vaikuttavaa kotoutumista pääkaupunkiseudulla ja Lahdessa" (Integration of Migrants through Urban Social Work), which will be carried out by Diaconia University of Applied Sciences and the University of Helsinki (Helsingin yliopisto 2017). The report and booklet will also be used as part of the study materials for various modules of the social service students' curriculum at Diaconia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki.

5 DISCUSSION

In this section, the topics of ethics, challenges, and limitations, during information gathering and product development are discussed, as well as my own professional development during the course of the thesis study.

5.1 Ethics

According to a recent Canadian policy statement, *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, confidentiality refers to "the obligation of an individual or organization to safeguard entrusted information. This includes obligations to protect information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss or theft. Fulfilling the ethical duty of confidentiality is essential to the trust relationship between researcher and participant, and to the integrity of the research project." (Government of Canada 2014.)

During the data collection process for this thesis, in accordance with rules of confidentiality, care has been taken to ensure that it is not possible to identify the participants. Their names, ages, and countries of origin are not included in the booklet. Originally, I had considered using the country of origin as a way to differentiate between the women's experiences, and I had received permission from the participants to do so. However, as the Neighbourhood Mothers of Finland are not as yet a very large group, I decided that it would be better to have no means of identification. On the same note, as service professionals working with immigrants and refugees have been known to receive hate mail and threats, I decided to keep their identities anonymous, as well. The main point, in the end, are the experiences conveyed.

Before conducting the interviews, interviewees were given an introduction to the thesis topic and concepts behind. When permission to record the interviews was

granted, I promised that after transcribing the interviews, the recordings would be deleted, and I had done so.

As the data collection was carried out during an internship with Neighbourhood Mothers, no consent forms were required.

5.2 Challenges

As many of the Neighbourhood Mothers and service professionals mentioned during the interviews, language can be a significant challenge in intercultural communication. This includes not only the spoken or written language, but also differences in body language, and differences in the conveyance and reception of information, irrespective of intention, related to cultural difference and individual experience.

In each of the interview sessions with the Neighbourhood Mothers, I noticed that the direction of the participants' responses had a tendency to sway towards the faults in the structural aspect of service provision, rather than their experiences of communications between themselves and the service providers. This was understandable, and may be partly due to a lack of clarity in the instructions at the beginning of the interview, related to either content, or something lost in translation. This was challenging at times, as both myself and the participants have varying degrees of fluency in Finnish.

Another reason could be that there had been many previous training sessions or discussions where the Neighbourhood Mothers had been invited to offer suggestions for the improvement of various public services in their regions, and that becoming familiar with this kind of process, perhaps assumed that these interview sessions were similar to those they had participated in before. At first, this was slightly disconcerting, as I wondered if I would be able to gather the kind of information relevant to my thesis questions.

Initially, I had intentionally kept the questions quite broad, in order to prevent 'feeding' any kinds of answers to the participants, or influencing their answers in any way through questions that were too detailed. In subsequent interview sessions, I tried to somewhat narrow the questions so that the participants would understand that I was looking not for examples of structural faults in the systems of services, but for their experiences, both positive and negative, in intercultural communications as service users.

However, during one of the last group interview sessions, it came to my mind that some of the structural faults in service provision that were being mentioned by the participants, though these may affect all service users to some degree, are ones that may affect immigrants living in Finland significantly more than others. Some of the problems mentioned by the participants were such that they affected only immigrants. Especially in this case, I decided that the service structure related experiences of the participants would also be worthwhile to include in the thesis product, for the purpose of bringing these to the attention of the service providers.

One example of the above are problems in the integration process. Some participants had mentioned that in the first years of being in Finland, if they had been at home with their children, or working, then after the children were in daycare and school, or when their job had ended, they were ineligible for Finnish language courses within the integration process system. As not everyone can afford full-time Finnish courses by themselves, and older immigrants are usually not the first to be offered Finnish courses, many are left alone to try to find a way to build their life in Finland without the possibility to learn the language - which is generally known to be a requirement for employment in Finland.

Although I had certainly gained some measure of trust from the target group due to the fact that I had participated in the training sessions as a Neighbourhood Mother and as a project worker, there was still some degree of challenge

remaining with regard to the participants trusting me with the information they shared, and trusting that their names would not be used, especially as I had met most of them only briefly during the training sessions. As many of them are coming from countries where authorities are often not to be trusted, I could comprehend their reluctance. According to the Handbook of International Social Work, "There may be a general distrust of authority by many immigrants and refugees who enter the United States or other Western countries from nations where freedom is limited and oppression is prevalent. Because of fears of exposure and the ramifications of expressing needs or weaknesses, including a fear of deportation, many immigrants or refugees do not do not disclose the depth or range of adjustment problems they experience." (Healy & Link 2012, 76.) Some of the participants did not want to have their voices recorded for transcribing later, and it was challenging to write on paper, in what is a second language to both interviewer and interviewee, the participants' experiences.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Due to the relatively small target group, the amount and types of experiences gathered may have been limited. Additionally, as all of the participants, including the service professionals, are women, the study has been carried out from an entirely female perspective.

As mentioned in the previous section describing challenges, some of the participants did not wish to provide detailed information of their experiences, perhaps due to fear or mistrust, and it may be that the information conveyed may have been self-censored at times. The target group lives in a more multicultural areas in Helsinki, Vantaa, and Espoo, and do not necessarily represent the experiences of immigrants in different cities in Finland, especially in northern cities, where there is a smaller immigrant population. Also, as previously mentioned in the section on challenges, the language barriers might also have

prevented the information to being conveyed clearly and thoroughly, from the side of the interviewer and interviewees. That being said, there was sincere effort given during the interviews to faithfully record the participants' experiences, and the utmost care was used in attempting to extract and maintain the clear meaning of the same during the translation process.

5.4 Professional Development

I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to be a participant in the Neighbourhood Mothers training sessions in Espoo, on Saturdays from January to April 2016, receiving a certificate as a Neighbourhood Mother in May 2016. Additionally, I completed two internships with Neighbourhood Mothers at Nicehearts during 2016. The training sessions complemented well my education in Social Services at Diak, both in development of my knowledge of services in Finland, and in the Finnish language.

During the process of data collection, I was able to continue to practice my skills in active listening - something we covered both in school and during the training, and which is a very important tool when working with clients in social services. The interview process also provided an important lesson in learning to be flexible, and not having too rigid an idea of what the structure of the interview should be. It was a useful experience to let go of trying to control the direction of the interviews, and to allow the flow to go where it would, regardless or not if the information conveyed would be useful. In this way, when there was more patience and less control, the interviews yielded better results.

The interviews with the three social service professionals were particularly valuable in increasing my understanding of intercultural communication from the perspective of the service provider. It was especially helpful for me to hear their

individual approaches to their work, and the advice they would offer to other social service professionals.

Lastly, from the start of the process in January until December 2016, interacting and becoming acquainted with the other Neighbourhood Mothers during training sessions and the various other events during the two internships have afforded me a great opportunity - both to actively dismantle my own misconceptions and assumptions, as well as to practice and increase my own intercultural communication and understanding, in a very enjoyable way.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By way of a conclusion, I will offer a few recommendations, based on the information conveyed by both the Neighbourhood Mothers, and the service professionals interviewed for this product thesis.

To begin with, I would like to reiterate a few of the points that the service professionals mentioned in their interviews. Firstly, it is important to not be afraid to ask the service users questions related to their cultural and religious beliefs, whenever that information is relevant and needed. Such questions can be asked in a respectful manner, and may help to both facilitate effective service provision, and to preventing misunderstandings.

Secondly, service professionals who have the possibility to interact with the service users in community events or other such settings have the potential to influence community development in this way, positively and constructively, on many levels. This type of interaction can foster the building of trust between service professionals and service users, in addition to providing valuable

opportunities to further develop one's intercultural communication skills by increasing one's own knowledge and understanding of other cultures.

It is important also to keep in mind that in the experience of many service users who are hailing from certain countries where there exists political and social unrest and corruption, persons holding official positions are often felt not to be trustworthy. This may also influence the service users' attitudes towards those who are considered to hold official positions here in Finland. Generally, the more trust that exists between the service user and service professional, the more likely it is that the service professional will be able to both effectively conduct his work, and help the service user. Therefore, the efforts which are made to build relationships of trust between the service users who are immigrants, and the service professionals, can be a significant factor in achieving successful results in service provision.

Lastly, for those service professionals who do not have the opportunity to interact with service users outside of work, according to the service professionals interviewed, being 'present' and practicing active listening skills, as well as small gestures, such as learning a few words of the service users' language, interacting with their children if they are present in the office - even just remembering to smile, are all elements that help to create a relaxed atmosphere, and to facilitate a relationship of trust.

In the discussions with the Neighbourhood Mothers, who kindly offered their perspectives as the service users, there were a few themes that revealed themselves repeatedly throughout the interviews. However, the theme mentioned most often of these was, very simply, respect. We all need to feel that we are respected by others. According to the experiences recounted in the interviews, sometimes this respect was hampered by a lack of intercultural communication skills, or, at other times, perhaps just a general lack of communication skills. Sometimes, the disrespect was blatantly racist and discriminatory, based on

prejudice, assumptions and stereotypes. Perhaps some of the cases described occurred due to simple and unfortunate misunderstandings on one or both sides - a problem which might easily be avoided by practicing active listening, and by asking pertinent questions, as was noted earlier.

To conclude, I would like to state that throughout the interview process with both the service professionals and the Neighbourhood Mothers, it came to my attention that one of the best methods - if one may call it a method - to ensure quality service provision in the social, health, employment and integration services, would be for the service professional to simply treat the service user as they would want to be treated, if he or she were in the same position. This applies whether the service user is a native Finn or an immigrant, asylum seeker or refugee. The bottom line is, every single person is a human being, with their own story, and each person deserves to be treated fairly and respectfully.

Link to booklet: <https://joom.ag/xzTW>

REFERENCES

- Arbona, C., Olvera, N., Rodriguez, N., Hagan, J., Linares, A. and Wisener, M. 2011. Acculturative stress among documented and undocumented Latino immigrants in the United States. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 32, 362-384.
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America 2016. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Accessed on 19.1.2017. <https://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/posttraumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd>
- Barrett, D.J. 2014. *Leadership Communication*. Fourth Edition. McGraw-Hill Education, New York.
- Bhugra, D. and Becker, M.A. 2005. Migration, cultural bereavement and cultural identity. *The World Psychiatry Association*. Feb:(4)1. Accessed on 13.1.2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1414713/>
- Brabeck, K., Lykes, M.B. and Lustig, S.L. 2013. *The Psychosocial Impact of Detention and Deportation on U.S. Migrant Children and Families: A Report for the Inter-American Human Rights Court*. August 2013. Accessed on 13.1.2017. <http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/humanrights/doc/IACHR%20Report%20on%20Pyschosocial%20Impact%20of%20Detention%20%20Deportation-FINAL%208-16-13.pdf>
- Cavazos-Rehg, P.A., Zayas, L.H. and Sptiznagel, E.L. 2007. Legal status, emotional wellbeing, and subjective health status of Latino immigrants. *Journal of the National Medical Association*, 99, 1126-1131.

- Cities of Migration 2013. Neighbourhood Mothers Leading the Way in Neukölln. District Office Neukölln. April 17, 2013. Neukölln, Germany. Accessed 28.4.2016. http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/neighbourhood-mothers-leading-the-way-in-neukolln
- Clayton, M. 2016. The Impact of PTSD on Refugee Language Learners. California State University, Northridge. Accessed on 3.1.2017. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Martha_Clayton/publication/299467247_The_Impact_of_PTSD_on_Refugee_Language_Learners/links/572812af08ae586b21e29ca7.pdf?origin=publication_detail
- Diener, E. and Ryan, K. 2009. Subjective Well-Being: A General Overview. University of Illinois, Illinois. Vol. 39, Issue 4. Accessed on 3.2.2017. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/008124630903900402>
- Furze, D. and Gale, C. 1996. Interpreting Management: Exploring Change and Complexity. International Thomson Business Press, London.
- Galanti, G. 2015. Caring for Patients from Different Cultures. Fifth Edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.
- Government of Canada 2014. Panel on Research Ethics. TCPS 2 - Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. Chapter 5. Privacy and Confidentiality. Accessed on 11.3.2017. <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter5-chapitre5/>
- Hacker, K., Chu, J., Leung, C., Marra, R., Brahim, M., English, M. and Marlin, M.P. 2011. The impact of immigration and customs enforcement on immigrant health: Perceptions of immigrants in Everett, Massachusetts, USA. *Social Science Medicine*, 73(4), 586-594.

- Hafford-Letchfield, T. and Gallop, L. 2012. How to become a better manager in social work and social care: essential skills for managing care. Jessica Kingsley, London. Available from: eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost). Accessed on 27.1.2017.
- Healy, L. and Link, R. 2012. Handbook of International Social Work - Human Rights, Development and the Global Profession, Chapter 10: Work with Immigrants and Refugees, Oxford University Press
- Helsingin yliopisto 2017. Kaupunkitutkimus ja Metropolitiikka. Accessed 17.3.2017. <http://www.helsinki.fi/kaupunkitutkimus/>
- Kitzinger, J. 1995. Qualitative Research: Introducing focus groups. British Medical Journal. Volume 311. 29 July 1995. Glasgow University Media Group, Glasgow. Accessed on 27.1.2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2550365/pdf/bmj00603-0031.pdf>
- Korkiasaari, J and Söderling, I. 1998. Finland: from a country of emigration into a country of immigration. In Söderling I. (ed). A changing pattern of migration in Finland and its surroundings. Publications of the Population Research Institute, Series D 32/1998, 7–28.
- Kosa, M., and Hansen, S. 2006. Executive function and memory in posttraumatic stress disorder: A study of Bosnian war veterans. *European Psychiatry*, 21, 167–173.
- Lehti, V., Antas, B., Kärnä, T. and Tuisku, K. 2016. The assessment of traumatized refugees: clinical practices at the Cultural Psychiatry Outpatient Clinic. *Psychiatria Fennica* 2016; 47:17-31. Accessed on 12.1.2017.

http://www.psykiatriantutkimussaatio.fi/uploads/files/ART2_2016.pdf

Raento, P. and Husso, K. 2002. Cultural diversity in Finland. *Fennia* 180: 1–2, pp. 151–164. Helsinki. Accessed on 2.1.2017. <http://ojs.tsv.fi/index.php/fennia/article/download/3773/3564>

Santoro, N. 1997. Why won't they talk: The difficulties of engaging victims of trauma in classroom interaction. *TESOL in Context*, 7(2), 14-18.

Shapiro, J.P., and Gross, S.J. 2008. *Ethical Education Leadership in Turbulent Times: (Re)solving Moral Dilemmas*. Taylor & Francis Group, New York. Accessed on 10.3.2017. https://books.google.fi/books?hl=fi&lr=&id=6YxK2Oim03AC&oi=fnd&pg=PA119&dq=equality+and+equity&ots=3XSzwt5aVP&sig=hTt4l_gLgn3SMaO561pf6pZZhSs&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=equality%20and%20equity&f=false

Shapiro, J.P., and Stefkovich, J.A. 2005. *Ethical leadership and decision making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas*. 2nd ed. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., New Jersey.

Statistics Finland 2014. Number of persons with foreign background exceeded 300,000. 10 December 2014. Accessed on 2.1.2017. http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2013/02/vaerak_2013_02_2014-12-10_tie_001_en.html

STV 1999. *Statistical yearbook of Finland 1999*. Statistics Finland, Helsinki.

STV 2000. *Statistical yearbook of Finland 2000*. Statistics Finland, Helsinki.

Tilastokeskus 2016. Maahanmuuttajat väestössä. Ulkomaan kansalaiset, ulkomaalaistaustaiset, vieraskieliset ja ulkomailla syntyneet 1990–2015. Accessed on 15.1.2017. <https://www.stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/maahanmuuttajat-vaestossa>

Söndergaard, H.P. and Theorell, T. 2004. Language acquisition in relation to cumulative posttraumatic stress disorder symptom load over time in a sample of resettled refugees. *Psychotherapy and Psychomatics*. 73 (5), 320-323.

TEDGlobal 2009. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story. Accessed on 2.1.2017. https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Valtavaara M. 2001. Maahanmuuttajien työttömyys laski jo 33,5 prosenttiin. *Helsingin Sanomat* 22 April 2001, A6.

Ying Y. 2001. Psychotherapy with traumatized Southeast Asian refugees. *Clinical Social Work Journal*. 29 (1) 65-78.

YLE 2016. Police report rise in hate crimes; vast majority racist in nature. 20.9.2016. Accessed on 12.1.2017. http://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/police_report_rise_in_hate_crimes_vast_majority_racist_in_nature/9178527

APPENDIX 1: DISCUSSION GROUP PLAN

Discussion groups in English for Neighbourhood Mothers

Friday, October 28th (2 hrs) Asukastalo Myyrinki, Liesitori 1, Myyrmäki

Tuesday, November 1st (1 hr) Asukastalo Kylämaja, Matinkatu 7, Espoo

Thursday, November 3rd (2 hrs) Naisresurssikeskus Pihlaja, Unikkotie 2C, Tikkurila

Topic: Intercultural Experiences in Social, Health, Employment, and Integration Services in Finland

Purpose: Research for a product-based thesis for the purpose of improving intercultural relations between service providers and service users in Social, Health, Employment, and Integration Services in Finland through the sharing of experiences.

Methods: mindmaps, group discussions (will be recorded for the purpose of transcription only)

Materials required: A4 paper, pens, whiteboard/poster paper (for text of questions in English and Finnish), whiteboard/poster markers, sheets with circle in centre, blank sheets, staplers and staple

Discussion Group Plan

Intro: 5 mins.

Writing: 10 mins.

Small group discussions: 15 mins. each (x 3) = 45 mins. (Kylämaja 10 mins. each = 30 mins.)

Whole group discussion: 30 mins. (Kylämaja 15 mins.)

Relaxing moment: 5 mins.

3 sheets in total provided (first two with a circle in the centre)

Instructions:

first sheet: question 1, a, b, c – negative experiences

1) Think of a negative experience you have had in Finland as a service user in:

a) Social Services (KELA, Social Office)

b) Health Services (Health Centres, Maternity and Childcare Clinics (Neuvola))

c) Integration Services (Finnish language teaching, Unemployment Centre)

Write about your experience in the circle on the sheet provided. If there is more than one experience, you can use another sheet (show example). When you have written down the experience, I would like you to think about that time, and try to remember your feelings at that time. You can write down words, phrases or sentences around that circle of experience that describe those feelings. You can be poetic if you like. If you like, you can also draw a picture of yourself how you felt.

second sheet: question 1, a, b, c – positive experiences

1) Think of a positive experience you have had in Finland as a service user in:

a) Social Services (KELA, Social Office)

b) Health Services (Health Centres, Maternity and Childcare Clinics (Neuvola))

c) Integration Services (Finnish language teaching, Unemployment Centre)

Write about your experience in the circle on the sheet provided. If there is more than one experience, you can use another sheet. When you have written down the experience, I want you to think about that time, and try to remember your feelings at that time. You can write down words, phrases or sentences around

that circle of experience that describe those feelings. You can be poetic if you like. If you like, you can also draw a picture of yourself how you felt.

third sheet: question 3

"Is there anything you would change concerning the manner or form in which the services are provided? If yes, what would you like to change, and how?"

Ask the participants to staple the three sheets together, and to write down their age and country of birth – no names will be used.

Discussion: Learning Café

After answering the questions, the participants can gather around 3 different tables. Each table has a poster paper sheet with one of the questions written on it. We will then ask them to discuss their answers in small groups, about 15 (10 Kylämaja) mins per question. After 15 (10) minutes, they will then move on to the next question until they have discussed the 3 questions. After that, we can have the whole group discuss/answer some questions that would summarize their experience of the session, i.e., was it difficult to answer, how did you feel, etc.

Short relaxation time (5 minutes) – For releasing stress "Keeping the attention above the mind".

Notes

- Times are approximate.
- Language can be a mixture of English and Finnish, and participants can assist each other translating from their native language to English when necessary. The atmosphere should be relaxed.

Possible challenges

- Language difficulties.
- Low turnout.
- Some participants may not have had such experiences.
- Lack of trust to share information/experiences.