



Stories of Finding Work

Exploring the experiences of young people
in gaining employment, work experience
and training

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Overview

To increase young people's involvement in Finnish society a national policy titled the "Youth Guarantee" was devised and then implemented together with young people and various organisations. It aims to help young people gain access to education and employment. As part of this, every young person under 25 and recently graduated people under 30 are offered a job, a work trial, a study place, or a course of workshops or rehabilitation, within three months of becoming unemployed. Furthermore, every young person leaving comprehensive school is guaranteed a place to study in an upper secondary or vocational school, in an apprenticeship, workshop, rehabilitation, or elsewhere. There is no legislation on the Youth Guarantee. Instead it is a 'service promise' that different actors are committed to supporting.

Students at Turku University of Applied Sciences were trained as Silver Community Reporters by an Insight Advocate Trainer and with remote support from People's Voice Media. They then used these skills to collate stories relating to 'Youth Guarantee' policy from other young people. In these stories the young people talked about their experiences of unemployment (i.e. benefits, disability), the support they'd received (i.e. internships), their current and future plans (i.e. studies) and how they are or were feeling at different stages in their lives (i.e. empowerment).

Experiences of support

The various ways in which the young people who have contributed their stories have been supported in finding work or further learning opportunities, demonstrates how the 'Youth Guarantee' policy works. For example, one [young man](#) describes how he got support from Ohjaamo - a one-stop shop where multiple actors and services are available under the same roof – in order to access employment, whilst another [young man](#) details how with the help of a youth worker he was able to find a job. Similarly, a [young woman](#) accounts for how a youth worker also assisted her in getting a place in Jokipaja workshop, where she is now on probationary employment that should lead into permanent work. Whilst she was initially concerned that the support may "mess with [her] income support" and that she feels that the support available in Turku is not as good in other places, she is still states that she is "very satisfied with being at this workshop and how everything worked out".

For another [young woman](#) the employment office has provided her support in range of ways. For example, when she wanted to gain an internship in a kindergarten and once she had located a suitable one the paperwork was "all worked out very fast" by the employment office. She was also

offered a work preparation course that paid her additional money which she needed as she was *“not living with [her] parents any more”*. She describes how when she was unemployed, the employment *“always found her something to do”*. What these stories illustrate is the diversity of ways that young people in Finland are being included into the labour market, and the multiplicity of actors that are involved in providing this support. In stark contrast to the Stories of Unemployment from Valencia, Spain, the support provision being offered here is largely viewed in a positive light.

Empowerment through work and training

Through supporting people into employment and meaningful training opportunities, the provision on offer is empowering people in their lives. A [young man](#) states that one of the interventions made by the support provision was a *“lifesaver”* as he had *“no activities in [his] life before this”*. Similarly, a [young woman](#) who applied to the Jokipaja workshop in November 2015 states how it has helped her find *“rhythm [in] her life”* and that she is now *“in evening school”* and is *“really happy”*. Talking about her experiences of trying to get onto a study programme on care assistance, a [young woman](#) describes how she applied to schools in Helsinki, Tampere and Vaasa but wasn't accepted. However, this year she applied through the Opintopolku project and was accepted into Vaasa. She states that she was a bit *“surprised”* as she *“didn't take the test in Vaasa”* but was still accepted and she describes how she is excited to begin her studies.

In addition to learning opportunities, support back into the workplace is also seen as an empowering experience. In one story, a [young woman](#) describes how she was unemployed for one year after graduation. On the day the story was captured, the young woman had decided to go to Ohjaamo to receive some support and on the same day she had been given a job interview and has another option lined up. She describes how she has a *“really good feeling for coming here”*. In another story, a [young woman](#) describes how she got her first Summer job and how this experience made her feel like *“a grown-up”* due to her financial independence. Similarly, another [young woman](#) describes her pride as she starts *“adulthood”* in paid work after years of sacrifices.

Working with individuals

From these stories a strong sense of working with the individual and understanding their circumstances is key to providing meaningful support. A [young man](#) supported by the policy into employment explains that he is *“really happy that they were interested in what [he] would like to do and that what kind of a job would fit [him]”*. This approach is even more important when

working with young people with complex needs. The stories of a [young woman with disabilities](#) and a [young woman](#) recovering from a mental health condition are exemplars of this. Both have needed particularly personalised support to integrate into work and society in general, from group workshops, educational programmes and internships. These personalised interventions have “brought meaning” to their lives and “helped [them] a lot”.



When people’s are not listened – as was expressed by people in the Stories of Family Life from Manchester, United Kingdom – people become frustrated about the service provision on offer. A young mother, for example, describes her experience with the employment office as being “discouraging”. This was largely because she felt that they didn’t understand her needs or ambitions and made “outrageous” remarks about her goals. She says that the work that was being offered came with conditions that would make her financially worse off than she was on benefits, however through her own “persistence” she has proven them wrong and found meaningful work.

[Click here to view the extracts from these stories](#) and [click here to view the feature story](#).

InnoSI Themes

The stories explored here are examples of how the ‘Youth Guarantee’ national policy that is focused on addressing social and labour market exclusion are **implemented on a local basis**. Although this is a ‘top-down’ intervention, a diversified and multi-professional mode of action is offered to beneficiaries, resulting in **choices** of provision packages that are tailored to the needs of the young people. As the stories demonstrate, the range of support from [job search support](#) to [group support sessions](#), to [study options](#) and [work placements](#), the goal is to support people into [meaningful employment](#). Most of the experiences of young people in these stories are positive and through the various **personalised** interventions being made and support services being accessed, they are being empowered to make changes in their **life course perspectives**. For example, the [young woman](#) who talks about her experiences with the employment office, describes how they are always just a conversation away if she needs any more support in finding work. This experience largely contrasts that of the Stories of Family Life collated by people who have accessed support from the UK’s ‘Troubled Families’ programme. Looking at the ‘User Voice’ from both these programmes it becomes evident that national, top-down policies and programmes do provide meaningful interventions when **personalisation** is at the heart of their implementation.

Summary of Insights

-  **Meeting the needs of individuals:** Support provision is at its best when it is bespoke to the needs of the people who are accessing it.
-  **Empowerment:** When support is provided in meaningful ways it empowers people, supporting them to have a stronger sense of self and their value to society.