

## WHEN EXPERIENCE BECOMES A TOOL: THE ROLE OF MENTORS IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

*Mentors share their life experiences and practical skills to support young people in maintaining their goals, dealing with adversity and finding their way into education or work.*

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**A new mentoring programme in Denmark and Romania has strengthened the skills of local mentors, thereby improving support for young people without jobs or education. The results show increased well-being among young people, stronger local partnerships and a solid foundation for future European development.**

The long-term goal of the project was to support young people in starting and completing an education, increasing their well-being while contributing to a skilled local workforce. Across the cities of Vejle, Denmark, and Iași, Romania, 14 mentors were trained in communication, motivation, mental first aid, and individual support—an effort that fulfilled the project's short-term goal of strengthening local mentoring capacity.

The mentor training was developed jointly and based on young people's need for stable adult contact and concrete guidance. A common planning template ensured that each young person received an individual and coherent programme.

A key element was working with the mentors' own life stories and career paths, where reflection on challenges and turning points strengthened their self-awareness. This made the mentors aware of the experiences that can create authentic relationships with young people. The training also included practical skills such as active listening, empathy, conflict management and support for clarifying education and learning needs.

The mentors experienced personal and professional development and strengthened their communication and guidance skills. In Vejle, where the mentors were either caretakers or administrative staff with no experience of working with people, the opportunity has meant a lot to them, and they want to play a role for even more target groups in the housing organisation.

Vejle and Iași plan to continue using the results of this project. Training materials,

The tools and mentoring model will be reused and integrated into future work with young people, and both countries will



Josefine is a mentee and now assistant at the housing association

build on the project together with a Finnish and Spanish partner under the auspices of the EU, demonstrating that the project has created both immediate results and long-term strategic value and sustainability.

### Interviews

Several young people from AAB Vejle say in interviews that their mentor from the mentoring programme is there for them, that they are listened to, and that it is easy and safe to talk to each other.

***"We talk together if I have something I'm struggling with."***

- Josefine, 21 years old.

Many describe how the mentor has helped them to get their thoughts in order, find the right direction and become inspired to get out more. Some emphasise that it matters that the mentor is a volunteer and not from the local authority, because it makes them feel that the mentor genuinely wants to help them and is not just doing a job. This in itself can motivate young people to accept support.