



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

: Grundtvig Partnership Project

Mentor Development Programmes
– Transforming learners into educators
supported by e-communication tools
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Transforming Learners into Educators :

Mentor Development Success Stories

Partner Organisations :

Association of Disabled Women ONE.PL
Cercle Passeport Télécoms (now Passeport Avenir)
Foundation Critical Mass
Humanity in Action Deutschland e. V.
Humanity in Action France
Network Migration in Europa e. V.

: Internet

www.onepl.org.pl
www.passeport-avenir.com
www.criticalmass.nu
www.humanityinaction.org/germany
www.humanityinaction.org/france
www.network-migration.org

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www.mentordevelopment.blogspot.com



NETZWERK **MIGRATION** IN EUROPA



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Lifelong Learning Programme

Grundtvig Learning Partnership Project

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Mentor Development Success Stories

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Transforming Learners into Educators : Mentor Development Success Stories

Background

Six European organisations cooperated in the Learning Partnership **Mentor Development Programmes: Transforming learners into educators supported by e-communication tools**. During the learning partnership they exchanged local best practices, identified key elements for success, and learned about e-tools to support mentor development, mentoring programmes and accessibility for learners with special needs.

The work progress was accompanied by the compilation of mentor development success stories showing the transformation from learner to educator in individual cases. This brochure showcases the most inspiring success stories. It aims to encourage other educational organisations across Europe to implement mentoring programmes as a tool to increase learners' participation and sustain the impact of adult education.

The Partners and Their Success Stories

Humanity in Action Deutschland e.V. (Germany)

Humanity in Action Deutschland e.V. is part of an international human rights education network and offers a wide range of activities in HRE/EDC (Human Rights Education and Education for Democratic Citizenship) to students and young professionals. The learners are supported in developing and implementing human rights „action projects“ in their communities and immediate surroundings. Former learners have formed an alumni network, contribute to the curricula of educational activities, design and disseminate innovative human rights education tools and are active as mentors for new participants.

HUMANITY IN
ACTION



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Marta Kozłowska

Success Story I : Designing, Developing and Disseminating Innovative Educational Tools

by Marta Kozłowska

In 2009, I was part of an international group in an „experimental“ workshop by **Humanity in Action**: For an entire week, we discussed the 1989 regime changes in Europe and other political transitions of the late 80's.

The first three days of the workshop included excursions and field trips, discussions, and testimony from eyewitnesses and experts. Over the last three days we designed together an innovative educational tool: a simulation game centered on a fictitious country „Allonia“ in the throes of political upheaval and regime change.

In the team we tried to derive patterns and developments from numerous countries of the 1989 transformation in order to build a universal tool for teaching about what has happened in the former Eastern bloc 20 years ago. We developed a profile for this fictitious country and role cards for the dominant interest groups, who in the game must come together to negotiate a solution for the regime change crisis.

Especially important to us was the recreation of the blurred and uncertain atmosphere, the tensions, complexity and ambiguity of interests and expectations of different groups within and outside of the rebelling communistic countries. The draft version of our game was played at the closing of our workshop.



Following the workshop we have improved the game and created a manual with the Allonia scenario and role cards to allow other groups to use this tool. Naturally, we have developed some warm feelings towards our work and we developed strategies for using the game back home and distribute it widely so that also other people can benefit from playing Allonia.

Not that I planned it, but suddenly I was no more a participant of a workshop developing a game, but a trainer and multiplicator using the tool at various events and projects.

Three months after the workshop I moderated the Allonia simulation workshop with a group of 30 adults educators during an international conference on history education. Using the feedback from this test, we updated our simulation manual.

In summer 2009 the manual was sent to Romania to one of the participants of the conference, who then played it with university students.

Personally, I moderated Allonia simulations session at two annual international alumni conferences of the Humanity in Action network.

„All in all, my experience shows that the step between participant and initiator is not as big as it seems to be.“

Marta Kozłowska

Allonia has been also translated into German, and I have tested the German version of the game with 10th grade students from the Sophie-Scholl-Schule, a secondary school in Berlin. This proved to be an extraordinary experience, since I could empirically see that the game, although with some special introduction and preparation, is also suitable for teenagers.



Throughout all this time, the simulation material has constantly been revised by many of the involved authors and participants. This decentralized process would not have been possible without e-tools like Googledocs and Dropbox, so we could all access, change and update the same files online.

In March 2011, two years after the first workshop, I played the simulation for the sixth time with a European group in the framework of an EU Grundtvig Workshop. As the workshop was planned as a continuation of the workshop on regime changes organized by Humanity in Action two years ago, from which it all has started, I feel specially proud that the game – and me as its facilitator – have gained such attention and appreciation, that is has been chosen to be a part of another workshop on the topic.

All in all, my experience shows that the step from learner to mentor is not as big as it seems. Sometimes it is simply enough to get inspired and motivated by an exciting idea and people to follow up a project and to live through the transformation from an enthusiastic recipient into an enthusiastic educator.

HUMANITY IN ACTION

Download :

Allonia Simulation Material

www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/307-understanding-the-mechanisms-of-1989-a-simulation-on-regime-change-for-use-in-youth-and-adult-education

The Association of Disabled Women ONE.pl (Poland)

ONE.pl is the first and only association in Poland, which tackles the problem of double discrimination (based on disability and gender) following the motto „Nothing about us without us.“ Since its establishment in 2004 the organization has been active in awareness raising, self-advocacy, empowerment, lobbying as well

as the production and dissemination of educational tools. Members of the ONE.pl have been active as experts in a variety of institutions, initiatives and in the media; consultants on legislative processes and trainers. One.pl networks with other womens´ organisations in the framework of the European Disability Forum and with other Polish NGOs in the Polish Committee for Social Dialogue.



The latest project started in 2008 and is the interactive website „Open House“. It aims at building a participatory online community of women with disabilities, their families, friends and co-workers in order to educate, empower and inspire about issues connected with disability. The portal offers different consulting services and web-based mentoring as well as online fora and chats. One can schedule online meetings with psychologists, lawyers, and social workers et al. The „Open House“ initiative received a lot of positive feedback from the community of women with disabilities and their associates, other NGOs and public institutions. Thanks to the initiative the issue of double discrimination has been brought to the spotlight through local and national media.

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Success Story II :

Empowering Women with Disabilities Beyond Four Walls

Abstract: Iwona Kotowska, educator and pedagogue, shares her story on how her transformation from a learner to a mentor in the field of fighting double discrimination (gender/disability) and empowerment. This transformation took place thanks to the interactive online portal „Open House“. Iwona Kotowska discusses the potential of the internet in helping to build bridges between people with disabilities who are very often stuck „within their four walls“ and the power of the e-community of like-minded people in fighting (auto)stereotypes related to disability.

Abstrakt: Iwona Kotowska, która jest edukatorem i pedagogiem opowiada w jaki sposób za pośrednictwem interaktywnego portalu Dom Otwarty dokonała się jej przemiana z osoby uczącej się w mentora w zakresie walki z podwójną dyskryminacją (płeć/niepełnosprawność). Podkreśla znaczenie Internetu w budowaniu mostów integracji pomiędzy ludźmi z niepełnosprawnościami (którzy są często 'uziemieni' w swoich czterech ścianach) oraz pozytywną siłę społeczności ludzi „podobnie myślących” w zwalczaniu (auto)stereotypów dotyczących niepełnosprawności.

The Open House Initiative : Empowering Women With Disabilities Beyond Four Walls

by Iwona Kotowska

An Amazing Adventure

As an educator/pedagogue working for and with young people with disabilities and being a woman with disabilities myself I thought that I do know the subject of disability in-depth and deal with it really well. As true as this may be, I have also discovered a lot of new aspects connected with disability and new ways of becoming a better mentor to others as a result of joining the e-community of the Open House Initiative created by the **Association of Disabled Women ONE.pl**. This „amazing adventure”, as I call it, started for me in the year 2008, the moment the „Open House” was launched in the internet.



Iwona Kotowska

„Nothing about us without us”

The idea for the „Open House” has been to develop an interactive platform which would tackle the most important issues connected with double discrimination, touch upon subjects which are still seen as taboo (such as sexuality of people with disabilities), give the space for discussion, sharing experiences and last but not least to empower women with disabilities to lead better and more rewarding lives. The idea was superb and innovative as this was the first time that such initiative took place in Poland.

One of the most important aspects for me from the very start was the fact that it was run by women with disabilities for women with disabilities but also their families, friends and generally for people interested in the subject. So the combination of „nothing about us without us” with the general inclusiveness was something not only needed but very refreshing!

An empowering e-community

The Open House has been organized in such a way that almost anybody could find something of their interest. It was thematically divided into „rooms”. For example *the kitchen* is devoted to the issues of healthy cooking, *the study room* to the issues of law, *the bedroom* to the

issues of sexuality, and *the living room* is devoted to welcoming and presenting interesting guests such as accomplished women with disabilities.

Apart from that there has been a possibility of having a live conversation with experts (eg. lawyers, psychologists etc.) via Skype or chat. Simultaneously there has been an ongoing forum, which became a lively and fun online meeting place for guests, experts and regular 'inhabitants'.

Being a learner first

At first I became a 'learner', a person who was visiting the „Open House“ in search of new information, source of inspiration or to meet new people. What was striking for me was that for the first time in my life I discovered the power of online communities and interactive portals. It was an important experience especially because I consider myself as belonging to a generation, which did not grow up in the culture dominated by virtual reality and which is still somewhat hesitant about its „positive“ sides. „Open House“ however, proved to me that online tools are 'no evil' and can be very helpful and efficient in achieving important aims.



Public Launching of the Open House, 2008, Warsaw. From the left Iwona Kotowska with portal's creators Emilia Malinowska and Magda Szarota

Moreover, it showcased that if there are people willing to truly communicate it does not matter what kind of tools they are using. With time I started to feel that behind emoticons there are real people who want to connect with me regardless of the time and space distance. That was truly something fantastic and had a very liberating effect on me. Thanks to the portal I could connect with people with whom it would have been difficult or even sometimes impossible to do so in real life.

Empowering Women is Key

The other important lesson was connected with the issue of empowering me as woman. The „Open House“ openness about the issues connected with femininity enabled me to get in touch with my own inner woman on a much more deeper level. The topics which were touched upon by the experts as well as chatting with my online friends about the deepest fears and problems helped me challenge my insecurity as a woman and finally to start regaining my femininity!

The most beautiful aspect about this process was that I did not feel alone even though physically I was sitting on my own in front of a computer screen!

„As the time went by and I grew stronger I started to feel ready to share my own experience and expertise with the e-community and so I became a mentor myself.“

Iwona Kotowska

Feel invited, be included

My ultimate goal has been to strengthen the inclusive aspect of the „Open House“ and help it become a reality in ‘real life’ as much as it was happening in the virtual one. I have been helping to promote the „Open House“ as well as its ideals. I have been giving presentations about it for my pupils back at work, as well as for the wider public in Poland and abroad (eg. through the Grundtvig learning partnership on mentoring).

I truly believe that the moment society starts to accept women with disabilities as full women – their inner strength will be channelled for the benefit of all. I do hope we are just a click away from that. We should all just press ENTER and join the „Open House“.



Passeport Avenir (France)

Passeport Avenir offers mentoring and mentor development programmes to young adults who come from socio-economically disadvantaged groups all over France, to encourage them to enter the Grandes Écoles specializing in engineering and business curricula, with the goal of leading them to high-level careers in companies or government agencies. The organisation has a strong business background (it was initiated by Telecom companies) and is eager to exchange best practice with other NGOs using mentoring programmes in Europe.



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Success Story III :

Successful Students from Deprived Areas

Encourage Pupils from these Areas to Follow Elite Curriculum



Florian Ribotta

deprived areas and convince the pupils in their final year to integrate a „classe préparatoire“/ Business school curriculum.

Born 22 years ago in a little village in the French Alps, Florian Ribotta joined **Passeport Avenir** during his „classe préparatoire“ (post-secondary classes preparing for entrance examinations to the French Business Schools after the A- level). Chosen among the most deserving students of his class, Florian Ribotta has been mentored by an executive of a member company who helped him to get to know the business world better and to gain self-confidence. When he started management school, he felt ready to start a new challenge: visit secondary schools located in

His action is part of a new Passeport Avenir program, set up in September 2010, which aims to meet and explain to those pupils the content and assets of that curriculum and to convince them they can have access to it.

A personal decision

When Passeport Avenir asked him to be part of this program, he accepted without hesitation. „I used to be in [the pupils] shoes. I know how it feels to be considered as not capable of integrating a ‘classe préparatoire’ because you come from a disadvantaged area and you follow a vocational high school diploma. Some of my friends who took a high school diploma in economics and social sciences or in sciences used to convince me that I would never make it. What a surprise today to see that I succeeded to enter a business school, while they didn’t.“

„Every one of us was a link of the same chain“

Florian visited two schools in December 2010 with a teacher of a „classe préparatoire“ and a mentor of a company member of Passeport Avenir. He really enjoyed the experience: „Every one of us was a link of the same chain.“ With no waffle, he described to the pupils how difficult it was at the beginning to follow the „classe préparatoire“ courses, to have a clear opinion of the business world and to choose correctly his future management school. „In March I still didn’t know in which school I would enroll!“

During his testimony, he talked about his daily life as a student in a demanding Management School, his interest in being a Passeport Avenir student, „I was glad to have been chosen by my teachers to be part of Passeport Avenir. I had the opportunity to meet professionals of international companies and my mentors helped me to build a professional strategy and opened, to me, a window on the professional world.“

„As a new mentor, I tried to encourage pupils just like I had been encouraged by my mentors. Without judgment and thanks to what I learnt with them, I did my best to understand them and convince them that they are not less capable than other pupils.“

Florian Ribotta

„A gamble that paid off“

When Passeport Avenir asked Florian why he accepted to become a mentor, he answered simply: „When I was a pupil, I wish I could have met a student which had explained me that nothing is impossible. Most of these pupils lack of self-confidence. The Passeport Avenir program permits to guide them correctly but above all, to give them confidence in themselves.“

When students came to see Florian after his testimony to tell him that he had convinced them to enter ‘classe préparatoire’, he felt that „the gamble paid off!“. „As a pupil, I used to hide my origins and my background which were both extremely different from the other students’ ones. I didn’t want people to laugh at me when they knew the truth. Now I understood that my difference is my strength. If I had one word to say: Don’t be ashamed of being original, be proud of where you came from and what makes you passionate!“

A story to be continued thanks to e-tools

All the Passeport Avenir mentees like Florian are meant to be asked to become mentors. To develop this project, we need to create a strong bond of empathy between Passeport Avenir and the mentees, that is to say to create – a real Passeport Avenir community. This community brings together students, mentors, and all Passeport Avenir's actors.

In addition to traditional tools such as emails and website, three complementary e-tools are a priority to build this growing community:

1. **Social networks** like Facebook and Twitter that create a bond of empathy based on sharing and the feeling of belonging to a community :

Passeport Avenir's Facebook Page **Passeport Avenir - Partenaires pour l'égalité des chances** is read mostly by mentees. The page has 181 fans.
www.facebook.com

Passeport Avenir on **Twitter** has 126 followers. It is followed mostly by opinion leaders and by Passeport Avenir 's founding Companies (Human Resources, Foundations, Communication departments)

<http://twitter.com/#!/PasseportAvenir>

2. Passeport Avenir's **blog** (Wordpress type) allows easy sharing of content and the feeling of participation in an adventure (coming in October 2011).
3. A **Viadeo corporate hub**
Viadeo is a French professional social network similar to LinkedIn. Viadeo's corporate hub is its most advanced e-tool. It allows easy sharing of content and of schedules, and it enables the interactivity between members and so on (coming in September 2011).



Humanity in Action France (France)



Humanity in Action France organises educational programmes with a focus on minority rights, migration and integration, as well as internships for young professionals (f. e. European Parliament, International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, etc.). Through its activities, the organisation has also developed e-communication tools for adult education.

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Success Story IV : Learning and Teaching through a **Human Rights Education Game**



Leïla Haddouch

The Pictionary of Prejudice

In 2008 Leïla Haddouch participated in the **Humanity in Action** summer programme in the USA where she learned about the history and contemporary issues linked to diversity in the USA and gained a comparative perspective on European and French realities.

Upon return, she joined the French Humanity in Action Network of „Senior Fellows“, i.e Humanity in Action alumni who live in France. Given the distance which at times separates its members, she decided to develop a website for the French HIA Network and a blog, and created Facebook and Twitter pages. Thus, she became the Community Manager of the Network, and was therefore in a good position to initiate group projects.

In December 2010, Humanity in Action France decided to develop a project for the Regional Week on Equality (Semaine de l'Égalité) – a debate on Equal Opportunity in the Media and Television. The HIA network members reflected upon the tools they had learned during Humanity in Action programmes, and discussed how they could engage a room of 100 people in diversity issues in a fun but educational way.

Leïla remembered that a Pictionary game had been used in a session on prejudice at an international conference of Humanity in Action in 2009 in Paris. The goal had been to follow

the normal rules of Pictionary: One forms teams and the teams ask a „drawer“ to pick a word at random, and try to make the rest of the team guess what he or she is drawing. In the setting of the Week on Equality, the random words were replaced by words linked to nationality, origin or culture. Since the team who guesses first is the team who wins, participants have to guess fast, and the drawer tends to draw a cliché he or she thinks will convey the message to the team. But the team can only guess the word if the cliché resonates with them...



In monocultural contexts, the game helps people pinpoint the common prejudices people share about certain populations in a particular country. In international teams it shows how prejudices vary from country to country, demonstrating that they reveal cultural and social constructs rather than a universal truth.

Through a few email exchanges, the Network members decided to use the game to warm up the room for the debate on equal opportunity, which was also interactive. As a group, they prepared the material and ran the game for over 100 people, divided in three large teams. Participants played along and cheered. A video of the evening was made and posted on an online magazine. Another video, specific to the game, was made available to the entire Humanity in Action Network in France through their YouTube page.

Leila's experience showed her that trying out an interactive educational tool within a group and keeping a sense of community , even „online“, can enable learners to develop the confidence to take ownership of the tool and become mentors themselves.

Today, Leila works as a Community Manager for a large advertising company. She participated in the Grundtvig Learning Partnership „Mentor Development Programmes – Transforming learners into educators supported by e-communication tools“ and attended sessions in Amsterdam and Paris. She ran the session on the use of different Social Networks and how to use them for effective mentoring for all the participants in the Paris meeting.

Success Story V : Using Learning Experiences and New Technologies to Fight Prejudice

Maryna Kumeda grew up in Ukraine, was an exchange student in the USA, and established herself in France in 2007. Maryna has been volunteering in organizations dealing directly with and providing help to marginalized populations such as prostitutes, poor families, and disabled people often of foreign origin.

In 2009, she took part in the **Humanity in Action** summer programme where she gained a deeper understanding of minority issues and discrimination in France through sessions with scholars, politicians, and public institutions. Meeting grassroots activists and finding out about successful projects to fight discrimination and marginalization inspired Maryna to take another stance and try to act upon and influence people's views and behavior through education.

Her participation in the Grundtvig Learning Partnership „Mentor Development Programmes – Transforming learners into educators supported by e-communication tools“ has given her additional ideas and tools on how to work with learners, how to transfer knowledge, how to involve learners in the process and influence their perceptions in a more effective way. Finally, through her professional career, Maryna carried out activities on health education and risk prevention within high school and university students.

As a result of Maryna's participation in various activities and her regular involvement with the Humanity in Action community across Europe through email and facebook, exchange programmes and face-to-face meetings, Maryna has started to intervene in high schools to discuss racism, discrimination and tolerance with students through historical knowledge, video projections and active debates.

Being able to share and transfer her knowledge using different informal teaching techniques and games, instead of lecture-type speech that too often leaves a student quite indifferent, has been an inspiring activity for Maryna.

In the next few months, she will be taking part in a Community Organizing training with Humanity in Action. There Maryna will further develop methodologies to empower young people to take initiative and become leaders and mentors themselves.



Maryna Kumeda

Critical Mass Foundation (Netherlands)

Critical Mass seeks to share knowledge of social processes that underlie (violent) conflicts. The aim is to provide young adults with skills, enabling them to prevent, to signal and to defuse conflict. We offer training to adults who work with youth, such as teachers and youth workers. Critical Mass has a double aim: to bring awareness about issues of conflict and identity but also to equip learners professionally with adequate approaches and methodologies, including video and audio material for conflict trainings and online seminar tools for learners.

**CRITICAL
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Success Story VI : Opening the Door to a **Potential Future** as a Trainer

Interview with Sofie Smeets

What is your background?

Ever since I was a child my parents raised me to think critically and look beyond the obvious. I was raised in Nijmegen, a leftist city in the Eastern part of the Netherlands. They set me 'a good example' by not being married out of principle, giving me the surname of my mother and by being environmentally friendly. This caused me to look beyond the green grass of the neighbors and when I was eighteen years old I went travelling in South America for five months. Eventually, I chose to study Cultural Anthropology.



Sofie Smeets

How did you become involved with Critical Mass?

I got involved in **Critical Mass** through my studies. I studied with one of the founders Bas Gadiot for one year. I saw how the foundation developed from a side project into a professional foundation with five employees. Many of my friends got involved and I wanted to join in 2008. Through projects in schools I have grown into the fabric of Critical Mass.

What attracted you?

I had just graduated, and the job I found did not offer me the linkage and deep thoughts that I liked while studying. To stay connected with the topics of conflict, identity and groups processes, I became active as a volunteer in Critical Mass. The fact that the foundation worked in high schools with youth offered me a great opportunity to come close to these groups, whom I normally would not meet in everyday life. The playful way to learn in Critical Mass projects, was not only a nice and interactive way to deal with tough issues, it also allowed me to learn from it.

What was the transformation you've been through?

After a training for new volunteers and an introduction into the Critical Mass method you gradually become a trainer yourself. I found out that I developed a passion for being capable and allowed to teach others and to learn from it myself. Teaching is a very direct mirror for what happens inside you. The things you do derive from who you are and you immediately see the effect: the people we work with are very direct.

In the beginning I realized that teaching is not easy. My workshops were sometimes a bit messy. I was trying to offer all my knowledge at once and thereby sometimes overwhelmed my audience. The structure was not well developed yet and I fell over my own sentences. I



was aware of these shortcomings and sought help and support within Critical Mass. My colleagues' coachings helped me a lot and gave me new insights into teaching methods. Moreover, I learned that accepting who you are is also part of the trade.

However, it took a while for real change to settle in. I became aware of it when I worked with my colleague Diane. After a workshop we did together she almost 'fell of her chair' and said to me: „Sofie, where did you learn how to speak in such beautiful sentences? What happened to your interruptions and

staccato phrases?“ That I remember being one of the best compliments I had ever received. I had made progress, I had grown as a trainer! I recall her compliment every time I train – it was such an encouragement.

„Training others in many ways also trains you to be self-reflective. Obviously I will always have much to learn. However, I hope to continue training others for the rest of my life. Critical Mass has opened doors for me to a potential future as a trainer. I discovered a talent that soon developed into a passion, hopefully for life.“

Sofie Smeets

What might you not have had if not for Critical Mass?

By exercising my skills and giving lots of workshops I have acquainted myself with a great variety of interactive tools. By designing your own repertoire you learn to have a different perspective on teaching, knowledge transfer and sharing. The playful and interactive Critical Mass way, which is not that common in our traditional education system, has made me more creative and flexible. The focus on your own experiences as the best way to learn had taught me that in a learning process you can be a bystander and a coach, but you can never do without participants experiencing things personally. I cannot transfer such experiences as a trainer, it needs to be homemade.

However, I would like to work on my role as a facilitator. As a facilitator you need to structure the experience and offer a safe framework, and then allow participants to relax and experience it. Without Critical Mass I would not have known a place where there is so much creativity, positive atmosphere and reflection.

I can say: Critical Mass is the bomb. Why, you have to see and try it to believe it.

What are your plans for the near future?

In the near future I want to train, train and train... I want to train an entire course and be involved in designing it, training and doing the evaluation. Furthermore I have realized that I want to understand more of mediation. I also wish to share with you that my success story depended heavily on the work and success of the founders of Critical Mass and their team – Bas, Hiske, Diane, Pelle, Reinout and Cecile. Critical Mass is so strong because of its enthusiastic, hardworking and inspired team.

**„Let's aim for the stars.“
Sofie Smeets**

**CRITICAL
MASS**

Success Story VII : „People Learn Best by Experiencing it Themselves“

by Marise Amersfoort

A short summary about where it all started

I was born with a particular interest in people in 1980 in the centre of the Netherlands.

I was always curious to observe the interaction between my family members, neighbours, friends and classmates.

Marise Amersfoort



At the same time, I have always been fascinated by things I won't be able to understand instantly, that are not part of my own world. I like to find reasons why people do the things they do, how people want to give meaning to their lives.

When growing up I gradually started to dislike conflict more and more, trying to avoid it from creeping into my life. I guess this inability to grasp the reason why people get involved in fights, whether acting as individuals, groups or states, has triggered a wish in me to find out more about it and dedicate my study to

it. After spending some time on analysing people's motives to initiate or join a conflict, I had a growing interest in how to transform the state of disagreements, get people into contact with each other and try to help them to take different perspectives. I studied the influence of various forms of media on conflicts in India and the effects of people-to-people exchange initiatives between Indian and Pakistani youth.

How Critical Mass became part of my life

It was 2008. My activities in the field of conflict resolution had been lingering but dormant for a year or two. Through my work I learned about a training in South Korea on intercultural dialogue. I guess my participation in that training event was my wake-up call, a stimulus to start thinking about how to further develop my skills and do something with my interests within society. I searched the internet for voluntary positions and that is how I came across Critical Mass and was sold instantly, without even knowing what was ahead of me and how important the organisation would become to me. After an initial meeting, followed by a training for new volunteers into the method and vision of Critical Mass, I felt at home right

away. Practice, theory, philosophy, fun, politics, personal development, sociology, psychology, curiosity, eagerness and inspiration all came together at once. This conglomerate might seem a bit disordered but that is simply because all these things alternate so quickly... And the good thing is that Critical Mass seems to attract people who feel equally at ease with this energetic whirlpool.



Starting to belong

So began my acquaintance with Critical Mass. Even before my own training was finished I gave trainings myself. Simply because the motive is that people learn best by experiencing it themselves. Not by studying some theory, learning what 'the best way' is, or looking at someone else doing it (ok, maybe once); but simply with some basic understanding, common sense and finding out yourself what works and what doesn't.

„This trust in volunteers gave me soon a feeling of ownership, belief in the method and confidence that I could do this too.“
Marise Amersfoort

Monthly trainings on various topics strengthened this feeling and a sense of belonging even more. And besides, as a volunteer, our contribution is appreciated in any field. At Critical Mass there is room for developing whatever talent, whether you are aware of this yourself or whether you still want to explore new skills. This way I found myself joining brainstorm sessions on policies and vision, writing training scripts, acting in workshops, facilitating, and coordinating a toolbox project and interacting with young people from all walks of life.



Growing

After the initial phase of my involvement, Critical Mass announced a Train the Trainer programme, which I eagerly joined. I so much enjoyed this constant process of self-reflection, group interaction, learning new skills and insights, discussing, being critical and absorbing the enthusiasm of the Critical Mass staff. What is worth mentioning is their believe in feedback. Among all volunteers they must be famous for this, always starting with the questions: „So, tell me, what went well? And, what was *your* contribution to that?“ Using this as a starting point for evaluations has made me realise the strength of this method. It helped me acknowledge my talents, taught me to look critically at what I still want to learn and discuss this openly with others.



Becoming a Trainer

My activities and training at Critical Mass have provided me with a steady basis to become a trainer myself. I have grown to become confident in transferring the knowledge, skills and methods and I am aware that this has supported me greatly in the other things I do. Moreover it has stimulated me to think of ways in which I can apply the vision and mission of Critical Mass in other settings as well.

I am also active as a neighbourhood mediator in Amsterdam, carrying the experience and knowledge gained, along in my pocket.



New Worlds

Lots of new worlds have opened up to me since my involvement: it has triggered my curiosity to meet new people, explore other initiatives in this field in the Netherlands and abroad and it has convinced me that when someone wants to reach something and believes in it, anything is possible. This understanding will be valuable throughout the rest of my life. I want to keep on exploring, challenge myself continuously to develop and apply my talents wherever possible.

The fun thing about whatever thing I do for Critical Mass is that I never stop learning. Every activity is a new experience. Like we use to say to each other: Critical Mass gets into your veins and you can't let go of it.

**CRITICAL
MASS**

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