

Migrant Youth Helsinki

An **Engaged Cities Award** case study created by Cities of Service in partnership with 2018 award finalist Helsinki, Finland.

Executive Summary

Helsinki, Finland, took the idea of design thinking, a user-centric approach that focuses on ongoing prototyping and experimentation, and applied it to helping Helsinki's growing migrant community. Through Migrant Youth Helsinki, the city conducted research, interviews, and focus groups to determine what services would be most valuable to migrant communities, whose members often had trouble integrating. The city then tested 30 pilot programs, moving five projects on to the scaling phase. These included Buddyschool, a peer-to-peer tutoring program now involving almost 1,500 students a week; and Job'd, which provides work opportunities and has created over 15,000 hours of work for more than 500 migrant youth.



The Problem

Helsinki, Finland, has long been a leader in sustainable urban living. With a population of 650,000, the Nordic city is consistently named one of the most livable cities in the world, based on its healthcare, education, and infrastructure. In 2012, Helsinki was selected as a World Design Capital by the World Design Organization. This inspired the city government to start infusing its planning practices with design thinking, a user-centric approach that encourages people to challenge assumptions and redefine problems in order to come up with innovative solutions. The new emphasis on design thinking was applied to everything from its city bike system to a new library.

In 2017, Helsinki took this mission a step further, setting out to be the most functional city in the world. The city went beyond enhancing safety and creating top-notch public services; Helsinki acknowledged that functionality was based on equality, nondiscrimination, strong social cohesion, and transparency.

The push to infuse all aspects of city life with these principles is partially driven by the influx of migrants in recent years. 14.3 percent of Helsinki's population has a migrant background, and this is projected to rise to 23 percent by 2030. Finland typically defines "migrant" as someone who speaks a language other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi at home, or who has one parent born abroad. Helsinki's work to integrate migrants is focused on people from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and African countries, according to Irma Sippola, the project manager at Migrant Youth Helsinki.

A quarter of the youth migrant population is not furthering their education or working after finishing secondary school, which is significantly higher than young people with an entirely Finnish background. On top of that, migrants in Finland face a high level of discrimination, making it more difficult to integrate into society. Disconnected and disillusioned youth often withdraw, which "can create a negative spiral ... leading to criminal behavior, radicalization, and even rejection of the entire culture," Tommi Laitio, the executive director for culture and leisure for the city of Helsinki, wrote in the city's application for the 2018 Engaged Cities Award.

A majority of Helsinki's population growth is a result of migration, which means the city's future is dependent on successfully integrating migrants into the social and cultural fabric of the city.

The Solution

Migrant Youth Helsinki

The We Foundation launched in 2015 with a mission to reduce marginalization and boost opportunities for all children and families in Finland. This dovetailed with the city of Helsinki's desire to improve its integration efforts. The We Foundation gave a 2.32 million euro grant to the city to run a five-year program, Migrant Youth Helsinki, which is aimed at decreasing segregation of migrant youth.

Overseen by Deputy Mayor for Education Pia Pakarinen and Deputy Mayor for Culture and Leisure Nasima Razmyar, Migrant Youth Helsinki concentrates on young people ages 15-23. It started in 2016 and now has a staff of three full-time people, one of whom is funded by the city and the other two through the We Foundation grant. The small size of the staff means it's critical that its work is done in concert with local groups, schools, and NGOs.

Crucially, the hub for Migrant Youth Helsinki isn't in the city center but at a cultural center in Eastern Helsinki, where many migrants live and work. Locating the office and services in the community was important for establishing trust early on. Being visible and present enables unofficial channels of communication to flourish and to develop into long-term networks.

“People want to feel useful to other people, which is a really powerful tool for change — this idea that you can actually use your skills for the benefit of the community around you.”

TOMMI LAITIO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURE AND LEISURE FOR THE CITY OF HELSINKI

Migrant Youth Helsinki spent a year in a participatory design process to understand the experiences of those directly affected by inequality. This consisted of establishing an advisory board, which was made up of more than 100 people from a range of professions, and a 30-person co-design team made up of experts from city departments, NGOs, and the Finnish Police Department (in Finland, the police department is national). For the design team, Migrant Youth Helsinki looked for people who work on the front lines with migrants and would be able to implement the pilot projects.

The design process also included a group of 10 young migrants who were chosen from NGOs, religious groups, and youth organizations already working with migrants in the city. Sippola had worked with many of the youth-focused NGOs before coming to Migrant Youth Helsinki, so she reached out directly to solicit recommendations for young people who would be well-suited for the project. There are more than 60 youth clubs in different neighborhoods, which helped the city tap into that demographic and provide recommendations of young people to help design programs.

“We’re fortunate with our youth work in Helsinki that we have good and established contacts with different immigrant NGOs,” said Laitio. “We have trusting relationships already, which helped in getting the project going so they didn’t feel that it was risking their work.”

Migrant Youth Helsinki identified three areas to target: education, work life, and social landscape. Sippola said that education and work life were clear focus areas because the data showed that’s where migrants were falling behind: 25 percent of the immigrant population either didn’t have a job or wasn’t in school — six times higher than youth with a solely Finnish background. The programs around education and jobs were set up to build skills to help migrant youth secure employment.

“People want to feel useful to other people, which is a really powerful tool for change — this idea that you can actually use your skills for the benefit of the community around you,” Laitio said. “We noticed in the design phase that a lot of migrant or diversity projects treat minorities only as objects or people who need help. People don’t want to be in a constant state of being helped — they want to be able to help others.”

Meanwhile, the third bucket, social landscape, encompassed the things that existed outside of school and work, like mental health, drug abuse, hobbies, friendships, loneliness, and relationships with one's parents.

After doing initial research and establishing the framework, Migrant Youth Helsinki relied heavily on a design company, Palmu, which was brought in to lead the information-gathering phase. Three-person teams from Palmu spread out in the community to conduct interviews, starting with church leaders, schoolteachers, police officers, and leaders of community organizations that worked closely with migrant youth. These teams then moved on to talk to people suggested by the first round of interviewees. The interviews aimed to get a baseline understanding of the existing conditions and gather ideas for pilot projects.

“When we don’t understand something, our first reaction is fear and insecurity, which can prevent us from seeing the good qualities in people. Every one of us are individuals and we all have something good to give.”

SAGAL HASSAN, IMMIGRANT FROM SOMALIA AND PARTICIPANT IN MIGRANT YOUTH HELSINKI

The interviewers heard stories of people not getting job interviews because they had a foreign-sounding name, of migrant women feeling pushed into a few stereotypical care professions, of academic advising that made blanket assumptions about migrant students and that didn't challenge them educationally. Overwhelmingly, the people they talked to spoke of feeling like second-class citizens.

Sagal Hassan experienced this firsthand. Hassan is a migrant from Somalia and wears a hijab, which made it difficult for her to get a job, both because of negative biases and because some employers required she remove it in order to work for them.

“Although I’m a woman wearing a hijab, there are so many other things that you can pay attention to,” she said. “I’m skilled in languages. I’m social, multicultural. I can practice many professions and my hijab shouldn’t be an issue when applying for jobs.”

Eventually, aided by Migrant Youth Helsinki, Hassan got a position as an airport gate agent with Finnair and is actively trying to break down stereotypes that are ascribed to different migrant communities.

“When we don’t understand something, our first reaction is fear and insecurity, which can prevent us from seeing the good qualities in people,” she said. “Every one of us are individuals and we all have something good to give.”

After talking with migrants like Hassan and hearing firsthand about their experiences, Palmu team members, together with Sippola, brought this information back to the co-design team. They held workshops to brainstorm how pilot projects might be shaped and implemented. The workshops, which were broken up to focus on education, work, and social landscape, were held three times a week over the course of four months. There was “huge enthusiasm” for

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them, according to Sippola, who said the 30 members of the co-design team were incredibly dedicated to the process and finding new ways to engage migrant youth.

As Palmu and Sippola were holding the workshops, Sippola was simultaneously meeting with the 10-person group of young migrants to gut-check what the team was hearing and get their perspective on the ideas' feasibility. During this process, members of the co-design team were also soliciting feedback from the communities that they worked in, providing for near-constant evaluation of the ideas and proposals being discussed in the workshops.

Ultimately, Migrant Youth Helsinki wanted all programs to strengthen social relations and rely on volunteers. After four months of workshops and informal feedback, the group chose 30 ideas to test, based on things like customer value, practicality, and scalability. These were assessed using rapid iterative testing and evaluation (commonly called the RITE method). Essentially, that meant that the pilots were continually reviewed on their progress and the team was making changes in real time. This commitment to prototyping and experimentation is key to design thinking, and is an approach that the We Foundation strongly encouraged.

“The foundation was started by two entrepreneurs who created an incredibly successful gaming company. They are used to rigorous testing, seeing if products work, and letting go of them if they don't. We were encouraged to be bold and to celebrate failures as important learning,” Laitio said.



Ongoing Evaluation to Identify the Strongest Programs

The city staff, citizens, and partners tested 30 pilot projects, and approved five to move forward: Buddyschool, a peer-to-peer tutoring program; Parent Support, which educates parents of migrants on things like mental health, education, and careers; Job'd, which provides work opportunities; Make Some Noise, which trains young migrants on public speaking; and Peer Jury, which aims to mediate crimes committed by migrants younger than 15.

The pilot tests were designed to last anywhere from two weeks to two months. Members of the co-design team played a critical role in experimenting with the pilots. For instance, a social worker on the co-design team tested a program that targeted families whose children had mental health issues, and several teachers tested tutoring programs in their schools (this eventually developed into Buddyschool). The goal was to get constant customer feedback: If people in the community weren't interested in a given program, it didn't move forward. For instance, Sippola said one of the ideas was to build a website that highlighted different possible professions that young people could go into. But when traffic was poor even after it was advertised, that project was ended.

After prototyping a range of ideas, the co-design team had to decide which projects to scale.

"The projects had to be scalable," Laitio said. "We had to have a realistic idea on how we could grow them — they couldn't be too resource intensive. There also had to be a very clear benefit to the young people involved so that they could identify what the benefit of the work is."

The co-design team evaluated the 30 projects, using a chart that measured both the scalability and user feedback. Then, Sippola met with members of Palmu to make the final determination as to what went forward. Finally, Sippola presented the five recommended projects to a steering committee, which is chaired by Laitio and includes members from several city departments, someone from the We Foundation, and two young migrants from the original 10-person design team.

The steering committee approved the following five projects to advance to the scaling phase: Buddyschool, a peer-to-peer tutoring program; Parent Support, which educates parents of migrants on things like mental health, education, and careers; Job'd, which provides work opportunities; Make Some Noise, which trains young migrants on public speaking; and Peer Jury, which aims to mediate crimes committed by migrants younger than 15.

Buddyschool

The Finnish school system is widely regarded as one of the best in the world, and yet many young migrants fall behind their Finnish peers when it comes to education. Buddyschool aims to address the inequity in educational outcomes. The peer-to-peer tutoring program takes migrant teenagers who are struggling in school and puts them in roles where they teach younger students, often migrants as well, who need extra help.

Eighth-graders might study short stories with third-graders, seventh-graders can plan PE exercises for second-graders, and sixth-graders might teach first-graders about math.

For instance, in a study group focused on literature, the older students might start by leading a discussion on different genres — sci-fi, horror, true crime, etc. — and then read aloud stories they've written. Then, the younger students write stories of their own, and the older students provide feedback. This not only expands the younger students' understanding of literature and language, but it helps the older students think critically about genre and what makes a good story. The older students also act as support for teachers in the classroom, helping students who would benefit from extra one-on-one attention or have significant language barriers.

Laitio said at the beginning, it was difficult to get schools and teachers to sign on to the Buddyschool program because there were so many “parachuting projects” coming in and out of the schools, which made it difficult to create a stable environment. In Finland, schools operate with a lot of independence, which means Migrant Youth Helsinki couldn’t approach a district and implement Buddyschool in a bunch of schools at once — they had to connect with individual principals and sell them on the idea.

Laitio said the key was identifying schools and teachers that wanted to be “trailblazers,” essentially using them as a proof of concept and testing ground. Those early users were then crucial for spreading the word about how the program added value to their classrooms.

Initially, Buddyschool was established to be very flexible depending on the needs of the schools and the students. The study groups varied in size and frequency, helping to make it an easier sell to principals and teachers.



Buddyschool is active in **22 schools**. It involves more than **100 classroom teachers** and almost **1,500 students** a week.

“We said, ‘Oh, you can do anything!’” Sippola said of the early days because they wanted to test what worked best.

But as more teachers signed on and saw the value that was being created, Buddyschool worked to refine its program. Now, Sippola said, the study groups and tutoring sessions are part of a curriculum — they happen either within the class or as an extra course. This focus on refining the programs and embracing necessary changes is key to design thinking and is an example of Helsinki’s continued commitment to the approach. Even a program that is successfully scaling still takes customer feedback into consideration and fine-tunes its offering.

The program has changed the way teachers talk about their students, Laitio said. Students who were struggling and were a constant cause for concern are now held up as leaders. It has also changed students: Teachers say the older students who act as tutors to younger students have more confidence and a stronger sense of belonging, which studies have linked to an ability to cope well.

“Having the Buddyschool [tutors] in the classroom, the [classroom teacher] gets extra hands and the Buddyschool [tutor has] an important purpose,” said one teacher from Itäkeskus

secondary school. “His self-esteem [rises] and he is learning as he teaches the younger one. He repeats and improves his academic skills.”

Today, the program is active in 22 schools. It involves more than 100 classroom teachers and almost 1,500 students a week. By 2020, it hopes to reach 840 teachers, 280 schools and 8,400 students. The program has not only helped improve the skill set of the Buddyschool tutors, but it's also done wonders for children's self-esteem. One Buddyschool teacher told about a sixth-grade migrant student with learning disabilities and severe academic struggles. He became a Buddyschool tutor for special needs students in first through third grades, helping the students with math and Finnish. The teacher says that the program has helped advance his academic skills, given him a sense of purpose, and boosted his self-esteem.

“Teaching gives positive (feedback) that I can have an impact and I actually understood something because I’m able to communicate to another person who is learning as well.”

SUMAYA KHAN, SEVENTH-GRADER WHO TUTORS THIRD-GRADERS IN ENGLISH THROUGH BUDDYSCHOOL

This is a common refrain from older Buddyschool students. Sumaya Khan is a seventh-grader who tutors third-graders in English through Buddyschool. She said the program has created “a loop of self-belief” for her and helped her to feel like she’s making a difference.

“Teaching gives positive (feedback) that I can have an impact and I actually understood something because I’m able to communicate to another person who is learning as well,” she said. “Any questions of, ‘Am I right?’ or ‘Am I valid enough?’ go away.”

Job’d

The Job’d program has a dual purpose: give young migrants hands-on work experience and tend to social needs in the community. The program pairs migrants with elderly citizens who need assistance and companionship, single parents who need childcare, or cultural and special events that need an extra set of hands.

“We create all the jobs,” said Sami Komppula, who heads up the Job’d program. “They’re all new jobs that didn’t exist before and wouldn’t exist without the project.”

Migrant Youth Helsinki partnered with a tech startup, Tremer, which developed an app to connect employers to the workforce. Migrant youth who want to take part in Job’d create a profile on the app and then are able to sign up for Job’d roles, which are primarily hourly or freelance positions. (There are other avenues that the program uses to connect with and hire young migrants, such as local community groups, but leaders said the app is by far the most effective.) The Tremer app launched around the same time as Migrant Youth Helsinki, and Sippola said the app has evolved along with the organization, expanding its offerings to people with a wider range of backgrounds and developing more visuals that represent ethnic and racial diversity.

Job'd, like Buddyschool, relies heavily on existing community organizations to both advertise the program to young people and support them once they're involved.

The importance of building skills and providing real-world experience was something the Migrant Youth Helsinki team realized early in the design phase, and it is something it worked to implement with both Buddyschool and Job'd.

“The work experience I have received from Job'd and the mobile app has changed my life.”

ISMAIL ABDULLAHI, A PARTICIPANT IN THE JOB'D PROGRAM WHO SECURED A FULL-TIME JOB AT HELSINKI'S VANTAA AIRPORT

Komppula said about 60 percent of migrants in the Job'd program already have the skills and the motivation to succeed; they've just been stymied by systemic problems and cultural racism, and they need work experience. About 30 percent of the migrants “need a bit more support at the beginning and learning the skills of how to be in the workplace and how to do the work,” said Sippola. That could mean they need assistance in getting a bank account and a tax card or training on proper workplace etiquette, like showing up on time and not using personal phones at work.

Treamer gives young migrants an easy way to build their resumes — they're able to get reviews on the app, which makes them attractive candidates to additional employers.

Ismail Abdullahi is one student for whom Job'd was life-changing. The 18-year-old high school student had been applying for jobs with no success when he signed up for Job'd through Treamer in May 2016. He got a position with a local mall that wanted to add more Somali and Arabic speakers to its information desk. After he got a number of five-star reviews through Job'd roles, other employers on Treamer saw his potential and began hiring him. He continued to build up his work experience while finishing high school, ultimately getting 70 high reviews



Job'd has created **over 15,000 hours of work for more than 500 migrant youth** who previously had little or no work experience.

and recommendations on the app. That helped him secure a full-time job at Helsinki's Vantaa Airport after graduating.

"The work experience I have received from Job'd and the mobile app has changed my life," Abdullahi said.

Komppula said the team is constantly thinking about how to strengthen Job'd. They're exploring offering more instructions within the app for some of the life skills issues that come up repeatedly, like how to fill out a CV. They also offer information sessions on topics such as "how to help the elderly," which can benefit a number of young migrants who are assisting at nursing homes.

"We really wanted to focus on young people who have motivation to be part of their community but they need skills," said Laitio. "The way they gain more skills is by working for other people and helping other people — those have been key to the success."

Currently, Migrant Youth Helsinki funds all of the jobs through the program, but Komppula aid as leaders continue to develop the program and work with more organizations, he's hopeful that some of the jobs, particularly involving events, will be able to pay the young people's wages.

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Migrant Youth Helsinki partnered with NGOs and private companies to train more than 120 ambassadors who provide support services for more than 5,000 migrant parents.

Parent Support

As the design team met with young migrants in the early part of the process, Sippola said they heard a similar refrain over and over: "If our parents just knew." Cultural differences prevented parents from being able to provide the kind of support their children needed to succeed in Helsinki, such as helping them navigate the educational system or deal with issues of drugs, alcohol, and mental health.

In addition to conversations with young migrants, Sippola said, the team looked at research that showed that second-generation migrants have a more difficult time coping than native Finns and that educating parents can impact children's success. The design team felt that working with parents would help the children integrate better and be more successful. So they held a planning competition, an open call for communities, students, NGOs, and professionals to present possible solutions. Through that process, they learned that the support services had to be offered in the migrants' native tongues — no interpreters — and it had to happen within the migrant community.

Migrant Youth Helsinki partnered with NGOs and private companies to train more than 120 ambassadors who provide support services for more than 5,000 migrant parents. (Migrant Youth Helsinki paid the organizations to conduct the training.) Services are offered in six languages and four subjects: understanding the Finnish education system; careers in Finland, including potential salaries and educational paths to them; supporting children dealing with alcohol or drugs; and supporting children with mental health issues. The ambassadors are community members who operate informally — they might meet with parents at a mosque or a community center or hold a workshop during Eid al-Fitr, when the community is already coming together.

One goal of this program is to address skepticism in some communities about Western medical practices and reduce the stigma associated with mental health challenges and drug and alcohol abuse.

“Their task is not to start helping in the sense that, ‘Your daughter is in psychosis, I know what to do,’” Sippola said. “The task is to make it so these matters are something normal to talk about.”

Sippola said one of the ambassadors for the Iraqi community used the Prophet Muhammad’s positive attitude toward mental health and the historic role of treatment in the Muslim community — the world’s first facility offering psychiatric care was established in Baghdad more than a thousand years ago — to broach the topic with parents.

The ability to use existing events and shared cultural knowledge has helped make the program successful, Sippola said, as has the fact that the ambassadors feel a lot of ownership over the program.

Though the program is still in the relatively early stages, “We’ve had very good feedback,” Sippola said. “(The community) feels like they have the power now.”

Make Some Noise

Make Some Noise was designed to train young migrants in public speaking so that they could convey their experiences to the broader community, encourage dialogue, and increase diverse representation in Finland’s public discourse.

“A big problem when you’re talking about young migrants is that you end up talking past the problem,” said Sippola. “Especially if you have white women [addressing the groups]. We wanted to change that and also change the representation so a younger generation had a voice.”

Sippola relied on her strong network of community organizations to identify and recruit young migrants who were willing to speak out and who came from a variety of backgrounds. She said the process was organic — Migrant Youth Helsinki found some young people and the NGOs recommended others. Then the 16 young migrants were trained in things like vocal tonality, charisma, storytelling, and talking to the press. A well-known Finnish communications firm, Ellun Kanat, provided the training.

Muttaqi Khan, who founded the Young Muslims association in Helsinki, is one of the youth in the program. He recounted a story of when he went to a primary school to talk about Eid al-Adha and the Abrahamic sacrifice.

“There were so many second-generation immigrant kids,” he said. “They came to me, and they were like, ‘Oh, I’m from here. I’m from there.’ They’re used to seeing white people talking about things, so they were so excited. And I [thought], ‘Wow, I can actually make a difference. If I just get the platform and know how to talk about my issues in a very effective way.’”

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MUTTAQI KHAN, FOUNDER OF YOUNG MUSLIMS ASSOCIATION AND PARTICIPANT IN MIGRANT YOUTH HELSINKI

The city is working to build connections with other Finnish groups like the Crisis Management Initiative (started by Finland’s former president) and Brown Girls Consulting so young migrants will have more opportunities to network, speak, and engage with the broader community.

Make Some Noise is in a unique situation in that it’s not as scalable as some of the other programs and yet it still has a lot of value — both for the students and for Migrant Youth Helsinki. The original 10-person group of young migrants disbanded after the design process, so Sippola said the Make Some Noise group is a great resource for feedback on various programs and ideas. While they’re not going to repeat the training, they will keep working with the group of participants from Make Some Noise. Sippola said if a member leaves and there’s another qualified migrant who wants to join, they’re open to that and will likely keep the group fluid.

Peer Jury

Peer Jury was established to be a mediation alternative for crimes committed by people younger than 15 years of age. The idea was to have young “jurors” help the offenders understand the consequences of their actions and intervene before the crimes became more serious.

Laitio said they were really enthusiastic about the program, but quickly realized that it didn’t fit in with existing police practices and would be difficult to scale. “It depended on one single police officer being very excited about it, and you can’t build a lasting approach with that.”

But even though Peer Jury ultimately didn’t turn into a full-scale program, it was far from being a failure. Because of the groundwork done by Migrant Youth Helsinki, the police adopted some new practices. They created their own unit to address crimes committed by those under 15-years-old. They also started a mediation unit to address crimes against city property (for instance, breaking a school window). Many of the initial crimes done by young people fall into this bucket, so Laitio said the mediation approach helps “make sure the first crime doesn’t lead to more crime.”

The city's commitment to trial and error is key to design thinking, and it's telling that city leaders don't see this program's fade-out as a misstep.

"The whole team is used to this idea that they can very easily say, 'This wasn't successful, we're not continuing with this,'" Laitio said. "I really value that approach, which is still fairly rare in Nordic government culture."

Keys to Success

The lessons of Migrant Youth Helsinki all center around design thinking. The encouragement to experiment and think outside the box when crafting solutions stands in marked difference to many government-run programs, which often have very narrow metrics for success and consider an abandoned program a failure.

"There's a tendency in NGOs and local governments to run projects where, even before starting them, we decide they're going to be successful," Laitio said. "But they're not honest about the learnings."

Migrant Youth Helsinki rejected that way of thinking from the outset. The commitment to continually soliciting and implementing feedback was apparent throughout the entire design and pilot process — from whittling down the initial 30 proposals to refining the Buddyschool model to ending Peer Jury because it was not scalable. Even now, the continuing programs are in a constant state of evaluation.

"You don't need more resources, you just need to use them differently. It's an enormous waste if you create a program that no one uses."

IRMA SIPPOLA, PROJECT MANAGER AT MIGRANT YOUTH HELSINKI

The design thinking approach also helped the Migrant Youth Helsinki team think more critically about the programs and what they were trying to accomplish, rather than lumping everything together under an umbrella of social good and not examining its outcomes.

"Working with designers has brought more rigor into our approach," Laitio said. "I think often when you work with these kinds of social issues, rigor is something that's missing — when you do well-meaning things and you're investing in people and creating positive relationships."

The fact that the team was evaluating programs throughout the process and able to quickly abandon those that didn't work saved the city time, money, and effort, Sippola said.

"You don't need more resources, you just need to use them differently," she said. "It's an enormous waste if you create a program that no one uses."

The challenge, of course, is even though these programs are having an impact on the lives of many young migrants, it's incredibly difficult to "create systemic change and bring together the different agendas of different city departments," according to Laitio.

He's optimistic, and he said the design thinking approach of focusing on improving a few programs that work rather than keeping a range of mediocre ideas can be expanded to other city projects.

Muttaqi Khan, meanwhile, said he has seen an attitude shift among migrant youth in the last few years.

"They have matured a lot throughout the process," said Khan, who, along with his sister Sumaya, was born in Finland to Bangladeshi parents. Migrant youth have "learned to think, communicate, be more proactive in their communication rather than reactive," he said. "That's very hard especially if you face racism because fight or flight kicks in. I've observed that people have learned to listen."

Muttaqi said being involved with Migrant Youth Helsinki has helped him make new connections and understand more people's perspectives, particularly "the struggles of females and women of color." He's planning to use these observations and experiences in his next venture: a podcast focused on interviews and conversations with people of all different backgrounds.

"We are lacking understanding overall," he said. "We want to express ourselves but aren't ready to sit down and listen to the other side."

Sippola, for her part, said the biggest takeaway from Migrant Youth Helsinki is to listen to your customers.

"Always listen to the people who you are designing your services for — never, never skip that step," she said. "You have to be in contact with people, networking heavily. If you're designing for elderly people, you have to understand their realities; if you're designing for young migrants, you have to enroll those people in the planning process. Without that, we would believe too much in ourselves and not in our customers."

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Cities of Service is an independent nonprofit organization that helps mayors and city leaders tap the knowledge, creativity, and service of citizens to solve public problems and create vibrant cities. We work with cities to build city-led, citizen-powered initiatives that target specific needs, achieve long-term and measurable outcomes, improve the quality of life for residents, and build stronger cities. Founded in 2009 by New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, Cities of Service supports a coalition of more than 250 cities, representing more than 73 million people across the Americas and Europe.



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The Cities of Service Engaged Cities Award shines a light on cities that are collaborating with citizens to meet pressing local challenges in diverse and creative ways. Helsinki, Finland was one of ten finalists for the inaugural Engaged Cities Award in 2018.

Each year, Cities of Service recognizes cities that are effectively involving their citizens to do things like reduce community violence,

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