

CASE STUDY

written by Ciofs-FP;
Valentina Teli, Tiziana Piacentini,
Lauretta Valente, Silvana Rasello

Amina's Choice

CONTENT

Case Synthesis	2
Case Study	2

Case Synthesis

Amina is an eighteen year-old Moroccan girl. At the age of thirteen she came to Italy accompanied by her mother. Initially she felt doomed as she had to learn to live in a new country with many challenging cultural and linguistic obstacles. One of the first big challenges that she had to overcome was school enrolment, an indispensable step for social integration.

On finishing junior high school she had to go through her first important transition deciding her future profession. She decided to get information at a vocational training centre. Now she is in her last year of a 3 year vocational course to become an “Administrative Secretary”.

From the beginning of her vocational training she could always count on the support of Laura, the head of the guidance counselling department. Laura guided Amina throughout her time in vocational training and helped her create a personalised career path according to her individual skills and career goals.

The end of the vocational course is getting closer. It's time for Amina to make a decision regarding her individual professional and personal life. Amina feels confused as far as her future is concerned. She even doubts the initial vocational choice she made when she enrolled at the vocational centre. Is this really the right training for her? Should she continue in this area or should she change and specialise in another field? And, what would be the best for her: to continue studying or to start working?

All these doubts are overwhelming Amina and are calling into question the decisions she has made and her chosen career path. These are important questions that she needs to answer shortly, but she must take the time to consider all her options and avoid making hasty decisions. This is the when Laura's role as a guide and support is crucial. Laura needs to reconsider Amina's recommended career path and her own skills and limits.

Case Study

1
Today, May 16th 2012: my 18th birthday. I'm scared, I'm an adult now, and I've one big doubt: what will my future be like? What will I do when I grow old? I will be finished school soon. In just over a month the school year will be over and I need to do the final exams in order to get the qualification ... And then? That's why I am here knocking at Laura's door, a guidance counsellor, who has supported me since I enrolled in this course. I hope she can help me find out which direction I should take.

2
My name is Amina. 6 years ago I came from Morocco to Italy with my mother. I left all my friends behind and started again from the beginning, in an unknown city, without knowing the country and the language. We soon realised that our new life in Italy would probably be better than the one we left behind. However, we knew that it wouldn't be easy.

3

Soon after we moved here, a girl called Chaimaa and her twin brother Kamal became my friends. They were our new neighbours and were Moroccan and the same age as me. Their family came to Italy when they were very little, so they grew up here. They showed me the city and helped me to improve and refine my Italian language skills. Back then I only knew some everyday common phrases and some words I learned while watching TV.

4,5

We took our first big choice together: deciding what to do after finishing high school? Which school to choose? So we did some research on the different public schools and the educational agencies in the region and collected all information that we could get. Immersed of an endless variety of vocational paths and different specialisations, we felt very confused. In the end, Kamal, the most confident of us regarding his career path, decided to do a 3 year course in mechanics, as he always had his passion for machines and motors. Chaimaa and I were less confident. My want to follow Chaimaa was so strong that I was willing to choose any vocational course, just so we wouldn't be separated. She was my point of orientation, my safety in a place that still seemed so new. In the end, it came down to convenience. One day in June, we went to the nearest vocational training centre in our neighbourhood to introduce ourselves, get an idea of the atmosphere, and get some information on the courses that were available there.

6

The truth is, with one glance we were panic-stricken. We quickly realised that it was a catholic school. On the stairs we met nuns wearing grey dresses. Also in an office there was a Christian cross on the wall behind a woman sitting at her desk. We, both being of Islamic religion, were dressed in our hijab... Immediately I thought of my father: what would his reaction have been if he had known or if he had been there with me? One look at Chaimaa was enough for me to know that we were thinking the same thing: this was not the right centre for us. We had chosen the wrong place. We were on our way back out of the school, when the woman at the desk turned round and asked us if she could help us.

7

At this point we couldn't leave. And while we were still confused and knowing what to say or do, the woman came closer and asked us if we needed some information about the scheduled courses that were starting next year. With such a direct question we had no choice to answer anything else but to shyly say yes. Immediately she gave us the information on the scheduled courses. She showed us various flyers and brochures. While we were looking through the information material that she had given us, and trying to understand what had happened, the woman that we later got to know as Patrizia, one of the secretaries of the centre, had already organised for us to speak with one of her colleagues, a guidance counsellor, with whom we needed to talk to in order to enrol in a course.

8

A few minutes later we met Laura. She arrived a little bit breathless, carrying a lot of documents for the new students enrolling, that she was going to deliver to the secretary's office. She was talking on the phone with somebody's parents, who obviously asked for information for their son or daughter. She gave us a sign to follow her into her office: a room with two desks, a computer and many documents all over the office. On ending the phone call she apologised for the chaos in her office and explained to us that during the enrolment period, work gets quite frenetic and as her colleague, who usually works with her on managing the enrolments, is currently on maternity leave she has twice the work she normally has.

9

She then gave us a one hour to talk on the history, the teaching philosophy and the important values of the centre. She assured us that the courses were organised in that way that students get familiar with the profession both in theory and practice through practical work labs.

10

However, in spite of all information she had given us in order to feel welcome, we still felt indecisive regarding the particular type of centre it was. Laura seemed to realise how we felt. She explained that it was indeed a religious atmosphere, specifically a catholic atmosphere. The school was founded by two religious teachers that believed in young people, and wished for every young person to have a profession. She quickly explained us the organisation of the centres that operate on a national level and the structure of the centres operating on a regional level, like the one we

were in, which are coordinated by a central regional head centre that manages different operative centres in the region. Every vocational training centre has one director that manages the centre. Daniela was the director of that particular centre and she was a nun, like nearly all the directors of the other centres. She also explained that the staff working in the centres were mainly unaffiliated with any religion. In our daily school routine there would be secretaries that would welcome us and who we could ask for information from. Furthermore, we would have trainers, who besides being our teachers would also cover functions such as guidance counselling. Laura had been one of the guidance counsellors for the last year. The centre has in total four counsellors. One of them is the colleague on maternity leave, Silvia. She is the head of division for courses and activities for adults, alongside another colleague. Laura and the other guidance counsellor are responsible for providing guidance counselling to young school-aged students.

She stated that the guidance counselling service would help us to define our professional and also personal life plans. And that besides the regular guidance meetings on offer, we could always discuss our chosen career paths or share doubts with her or her colleague.

She explained to us the different types of courses that are available and asked us if we wished to fix a date to meet again for a guidance meeting. She told us that this meeting allows her to explain the different courses in detail and for her to get to know more about our abilities and interests so she can suggest the right courses.

11

At that point we felt we did not have a choice and felt we must agree to this and after all, we started to like her. So, we decided to accept the invitation to attend a guidance meeting but it wasn't as easy as we thought: Laura's schedule was quite full with guidance meetings, hours of lessons and other different meetings. In the end she found a slot the following Wednesday. Chaimaa had her guidance meeting at 2 pm while my turn was at 3:30 pm.

12

We were anxious and fearful about attending the guidance meeting. I thought about what would be expected from me and what we should do and say. The following Wednesday we went to the centre together and we were there by 1:40 pm. Mrs Patrizia asked us to wait for Laura at the reception. At the arranged time, Laura called Chaimaa, while I waited for my turn. While I waited I was able to get familiar with the atmosphere and my surroundings. I noticed that there were a lot of people attending courses at the centre, both young people and adults.

13

At exactly 3:30 pm, Chaimaa and I changed places. Laura came to get me and directed me to her office. She let me get settled and explained to me what we would be doing during the one and a half hour guidance meeting. We began with a chat, as Laura calls it, about my life story. We talked about my interests and my passions, and she asked me about school; my preferred subjects and those I liked less, the subjects in which I achieved the best results and those in which I had difficulties. She asked me which professions I would like to pursue as an adult and what did I think I would be in 5 to 10 years. Then she made me do a computer test using a special type of software called S.OR.PRENDO¹. I had to say how much I agreed with the statements presented on screen. In the end, after having answered all questions, the results contained a list of professions based on the answers that I had given. My creative and artistic side clearly stood out from my interests. My passion for fashion and trends was something I was already aware of. However, this passion was strongly repressed by my mother. She believed that a profession in this sector would not be a good career choice for me, that I wouldn't be able to earn a living to survive and that it wouldn't be "real work". I told Laura this and then we focused on the subsequent interests and talents. We discovered that another suitable option could be to study secretarial studies to enable me to work as a secretary in an office. This would also please my mother as she would see this as a good choice.

¹ S.OR.PRENDO is a database about professions which includes detailed data sheets of 438 professional profiles. It's a guidance counselling software that matches characteristic aspects of the single professional profiles with the personal interests of every user. It's a useful tool in order to increase one's knowledge in the world of work and professions. It creates in real-time a list of coherent profiles including their own interests, so that the user can reflect on their own expectations regarding their future professions and even create career paths starting from a list of professions. More information available on www.sorprendo.it

14

Without much more discussion we evaluated the professional opportunities in this sector and Laura stated that there was a 3-year course offered by the centre that would be suitable for me. We assessed the subjects that I would have to study, the basic subjects, the specialised subjects, the most interesting parts, and the most concrete content as well as the practical experience. Then Laura took me on a tour through the centre. She showed me the halls where I would study and the computers that I would use for practical experience.

15

At that point I knew that this would be my future and that I would enrol in the course. Laura told me that first I had to formalise my enrolment at the administrative office accompanied by my mother. The following day we went to enrol me as a student as the deadline for enrolment was approaching. Chaimaa had to do the same. She also chose the same course, as was expected. My mother was delighted with my choice; she considered it to be the ideal profession for a woman.

16

The first few months weren't easy. While we gradually tackled the different subjects, I more and more asked myself if I really liked what I was doing and I often asked Laura for help and support. She always found a moment for me in spite of all the work she had. My relationship with her was very important to me from the beginning. I sought advice from her and no matter what issue we were dealing with, whether it was school related or not, she never questioned the choice of career path I made at the beginning, quite the contrary, she always reassured and motivated me to continue.

17

I have now reached the end of the 3 year course and this chapter in my life. I feel that in this difficult moment when I have to make decisions that will impact my life, all the doubts, and the confusion I once had are back and terrify me. So I find myself again knocking on Laura's door, seeking guidance and support, maybe for a last time. While I was waiting to see Laura I asked myself if things would have been different if I had originally been seen by Laura's colleague instead of her.

18

Entering the office that was now a familiar place to me, I was overwhelmed by emotion and I started crying and sobbing. Laura was helpful and sensitive as always. She tried to calm me. But this time she found herself also in a difficult situation. It was obvious that the reassurance that she always gave me wasn't enough anymore. We had reached the end now. Soon I wouldn't be here in this safe place anymore with supportive teachers around me to help me through difficult situations. Real life was waiting for me and I was not ready for it. Together we tried to sort out my situation. Again I told her about my fears and my indecisiveness about my chosen vocational path and the future that was ahead of me.

19

These doubts had previously emerged on other occasions. The course was a difficult and my personal and professional limitations had emerged during it. And at the same time I was recognising my suitability more and more to other professional areas. I am not good at numbers and accounting. Precision is not one of my predominant characteristics, and I do not like having to sit at a desk for eight hours a day working at a computer or answering the phone. I am the opposite of this. I am extroverted, dynamic and imaginative. I need to invent and create new things. But now that I had finished the course we needed to find a solution.

20

At that point, even Laura herself seemed indecisive and insecure to me. I no longer had a strong and confident guidance counsellor in front of me, but a totally new person that I have never met before. It was like realising the truth for the first time and seeing me as I really am: my characteristics, my preferences and my limitations. From that moment on we basically restarted our search for a suitable vocational training course and began to find answers to all questions I had going around in my head.

Laura asked me to give her a few days to create a new action plan for my career path. She realised that it would be helpful to get an external opinion as this would give her the necessary distance from the situation and help her to develop an effective action plan.

THE GUIDE

PROJECT

GUIDE was realized by MetropolisNet and its network. This network is made up of organisations working in metropolitan areas to promote social inclusion, employment and urban development.

MetropolisNet EEIG

www.metropolisnet.eu

MetropolisNet EEIG

MetropolisNet EEIG

Kronenstraße 6

10117 Berlin

PH 0049 - (0) 30 - 28409 - 223

FAX 0049 - (0) 30 - 28409 - 210

Managing Director

Dr. Reiner Aster

reiner.aster@metropolisnet.eu

Contact Person

Jasmin Zouizi

jasmin.zouizi@metropolisnet.eu

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission and the Senate Department for Labour, Integration and Women's Issues in Berlin. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.