

## Hoda's story

My name is Hoda. I am one of the parents' committee members. What I like about this project is that it gave me the opportunity to think, work and evaluate what I am doing. When I came to Netherlands I felt powerless. I didn't know how to help my child or make her at least feel that she still wants me. However and with what we are doing now, I feel more confident that I can support and mentor my child. And that I can help her thinking about her future's options!

As we meet once every week we put on the table all of our concerns, suggestions and ideas then we take practical steps to learn more and do more.

One of the experiences that I am proud of is the class room observation. Actually immediately after arranging for a theoretical session over Ithaka's policy in education, we thought it's important to take a practical step and get into the classes and learn more about how it works. First we had a meeting as a parents' committee to agree on that, then we talked with the team leader who welcomed our idea and facilitate this activity. A week later we were in the classes. We saw how teachers pay great effort to reach all of the kids. How they implement different strategies like group work, peer work and others. For me it was a very useful experience because it enabled me learning more about how my daughter learns and how I can support.

It is not the end of this activity. Actually and as we believe that we are messengers for other parents, we wrote about this experience in the WhatsApp parents' group. And we talked with lots of our friends about it to help them learn more about the class room strategies.

## Abdullhamid's story

My name is Abdullhamid. I have three sons and a daughter. Two of my sons are studying in Ithaka and the third is about to join them.

When I arrived to Netherland I felt lost. I had lots of questions and concerns. Unfortunately, at that time I was unable to speak Dutch nor English which make my problem more complicated. Later I heard about Parents empowerment project, and I knew that the person who leads the project speaks also Arabic. This encouraged me a lot to join the committee.

We have weekly meetings to raise our questions and concerns and we were able together to find answers and solutions. The project raised my awareness on different points like the Dutch education systems, the schools rules and regulations and more but above all throughout this project we were able to help and support each other. We were running open discussions in different points and trying to find solutions or exchange ideas.

Once one of the committee members raised a very important point about the swimming lessons. His daughter feels embarrassed to swim in the same swimming pool with boys. Actually, It is something contradict with our religion pillars and principles. He didn't know what to do. We had a long discussion over this point because it was an area of interest to many other parents. Later on we had a talk with the school team leaders to talk about the alternatives and he was very flexible. He told us that the girl has to have a diploma A at least and that she has to manage joining another swimming pool. As a committee

we talked again and tried to find out a solution were she and other girls or women who refuse going to a joint swimming pool can still learn how to swim.

Actually, I encourage parents to join us. We together can do it.

## **Bassel's story**

My name is Bassel Aldarra. I have two sons who are studying currently in Maetsuyker school. Since I have sent my kids to school I have a lot of questions about the school system and worries about my kids' future. Therefore, I attended all the possible meetings announced by the school or any other organization to learn more. However, those meetings were not enough for my curiosity and concerns until I heard about the parents' empowerment project. I was one of the first people to join the project.

In our first meeting with the project leader, she explained to us the idea of the project, and how will we together empower each other in order to help our kids. This idea was exactly, what I am looking for. That's why it didn't take even one moment to tell her that I am in. I would like to be one of the parents' committee members. It is what I am looking for. A project were we can talk about our worries, obstacles, concerns and taking steps ourselves to solve them.

Now I feel I am one of the school family members. I talk with the director, the team leaders, the teachers all of the education staff without any barriers. All of the doors are open to us. This enables us to learn more about the school, to have good communication with everyone. And to spread the idea among all.

One of the very useful sessions was meeting the leerplicht and HALT coordinator. As parents we wanted to learn more about the rules and regulation of the school and the consequences of breaking those rules. The school team leader cooperated with us to contact the Gemeente and find the person in charge. I was surprised to hear lots of things. There were lots of new information. As a committee, we agreed that this session is a very important one, so we got the whole documents from both coordinators and we send those documents to the whole email list of parents we have. The impact of such activities urges me to do more, that's why I try now to reach more parents and to create my own community, and to spread this negative power among more and more people. I am very optimistic that with this positive energy and the support of universities in their researches, the municipality in funding the project for more years, we will be able to do a lot.

## **Mohammed's story**

My name is Mohammed. I had the honour to be one of the first parents who joins Utrecht Overvecht parents' committee.

The vision of the project was unique, simply because it makes parents once again in charge and reminds them of their main responsibilities towards their children.

The project started with a focus group discussion. We were asked about five questions. The first question was about if we were able to mentor our children in the past and the whole group replied with yes immediately. While the second question was if we still able to do the same and almost the majority

replied with No. This is what we thought before finding out that the mentoring our children is still possible and it is now MUST.

As parents we agreed from the first meeting that we need to learn more about the the schools atmosphere and environment. What does V or R mean? What does instroom or uitstroom mean? What are the subjects our kids learn? What is the homework policy? And many other more points.

We talked with the intake mentors who were glad to provide us with all of the needed information. And as a committee we took the lead to invite more parents, prepare the reception and to arrange for an extra feedback session.

On our next meeting, which runs every Monday, we were talking confidently about how we can mentor our children and what might be the next useful steps.

There have been a lot of difficulties since the beginning of the year and now because of regular meetings every Monday at school with officials in many aspects that concern parents and students.

We have established a special relationship with the school administration, which facilitated our joint work and the supreme goal of empowering parents with all that is necessary to follow the students and work towards a better future for all of us.

And now we are working to attract more parents and join them in groups to be a future light nucleus supporting them.

## Nisreen's story

My name is Nisreen, I am from Syria and I have two daughters. I have been in The Netherlands for six months now. I'm also one of the parent's committee members.

I would like to share my experience in Ithaka with the other parents, because I believe we all as parents can encourage and support each other, also I believe we can make a big difference in our kids' life and future.

At the beginning I felt powerless and weak. I was not able even to help my daughter because I was not familiar with the educational system in Netherlands.

But when I joined the parent's committee, I regained my self-confidence and my power as a responsible mother. This is what I liked most about the project it empowered me to face my worries and concern.

In this committee we share, suggest and find new ideas every week.

One of the activities that I am very proud of is having an access the Magister application. We suggested this idea in one of our meetings with the parents' empowerment project leader and she refers us immediately to the person in charge who is Harm Pieter. We had a meeting with him and clarify to him how important it is to have an access to such an app. A few weeks later we had all of the needed date to enable us having access to Magister.

By using Magister application I'm able now to mentor my daughter and to follow her progress at school.

I am very happy to be involved in this experience and I encourage all of the parents to join the committee, to raise their concerns and to work on finding solutions.

