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# CASE STUDY: THE LOVE LOTTERY: AN UNACCOMPANIED MINOR, A NETWORK, A SOLUTION



**CIOFS-FP**

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## Table of contents

<b>Title</b> .....	1
<b>Competence</b> .....	1
<b>Abstract/Introduction/Background</b> .....	1
<b>Key Words</b> .....	2
<b>Key Characters</b> .....	2
<b>The Case Study Story</b> .....	3
<b>Questions, comments and topics of discussion</b> .....	7



## Title

The Love Lottery: An Unaccompanied Minor, A Network, A Solution

## Competence

### **CEDEFOP Client interaction competence 2.5:**

Make referrals and provide advocacy

Working with individuals or groups, face-to-face, by telephone or online

- Agree to the need to involve others
- Ensure willingness and ability to take up referral
- Facilitate contact with others
- Provide or support advocacy

### **DigComp areas:**

-DigComp competence area 2: communication and collaboration

DigComp competence area 3: digital content creation

## Abstract/Introduction/Background

CIOFS-FP in Trieste, Italy is a vocational school with programs for students ranging in age from 14-17 years old and guidance and training courses for adults who are unemployed or looking to re-enter the job market. The school is run by Salesian nuns and the dominant educational method is based on the teachings of Don Giovanni Bosco, who emphasized creating meaningful relationships with students in the classroom and in informal situations outside the classroom as well as through individualized guidance tailored to meet the unique needs of each student. Both teachers and staff work as guidance practitioners to individual students.

There are four educational tracks CIOFS' students can choose from: Administrative/Clerical, Sales, Tourism, and Information Technology. Students receive a certificate of professional qualification after three years. However, it is possible to earn an additional certificate by



attending an optional fourth year. Students are given individual guidance and orientation starting in their first year and continuing throughout their time at CIOFS which includes internships beginning in the second year.

While CIOFS has traditionally had a considerable number of non-Italian students, the student population has diversified exponentially in recent years as the number of asylum seekers in the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia has increased. In 2018, there were 3 unaccompanied minors at the school. For the 2021-2022 school year, out of a total of 231 total students, 117 were foreign nationals (nationality other than Italian). Of these, 30 are asylum seekers (4 living in refugee housing with their families and 26 unaccompanied minors living in refugee group homes in and around Trieste). This change in population has led to a need for guidance practitioners to work together to pool their information and leverage individual relationships and knowledge to better understand the changing needs of their students and help them adequately prepare for entering the job market.

This Case Study is the story of an unaccompanied minor and the social project designed to help him, the “Love Lottery.”

## Key Words

Collaboration, Kindness, Involving others, Communication, Social Action Project, Network

## Key Characters

Mohammed: CIOFS student, unaccompanied minor from Pakistan

Jennifer: Mohammed’s Teacher and Guidance Practitioner

Sabrina: Mohammed’s Teacher and Guidance Practitioner

Vito & Daniele: CIOFS colleagues



Dr. Crevatin: Local dentist with a “big heart”

CIOFS Staff/Teachers/Colleagues: Love Lottery Participants, Guidance Practitioners

## The Case Study Story

When Mohammed came to CIOFS, he stood out from the other students at the school. He was taller than average, had jet black hair in a perfect part to the side, and brown, freckled skin that turned red when anyone spoke to him. He had recently arrived in Trieste from Pakistan as an asylum seeker hoping to complete his mandatory studies and get a job that would allow him to support himself and help his family at home economically. Mohammed came to school dressed professionally and ready to work. He had a long way to go in terms of acquiring the skills necessary for entering the job market in Italy, however. Communicating with Mohammed was challenging at first. Aside from having no common language, his shyness was exacerbated by a missing front tooth he was self-conscious about. He looked down and avoided smiling and interacting with others.

Mohammed was 16 and had had little schooling in his home country. He struggled to hold a pencil and had difficulty writing his own name. He spent most of his time alone. During the extended break at school, he would eat a sandwich and watch the others play and socialize, but stay off to one side. Teachers would stand next to him sometimes, talk to him and put a hand on his shoulder to let him know that he was not alone. At the group home where he lived with other unaccompanied minors, while the other boys played video games, socialized, and went for walks around the neighborhood, Mohammed stayed in his room and recopied the lessons he had that day over and over, practicing his writing. After a few months, he began to speak and understand some Italian, but he was still mostly quiet.

In the second year, Mohammed made improvements. He could read and write, he was more relaxed and the class accepted him as the “quiet one” although he was not integrated into the group as hoped. However, a curiosity about him was building, in part thanks to a “wave” of new unaccompanied minors who had joined the school community that year.



Sometimes the class asked him questions. In English class one day he opened up about his experience coming to Italy. He drew the Balkan route from Pakistan to Trieste across the pages of an Atlas with his finger. He talked about how long it took him to walk to each country and how long he had to stay there, where they arrested him and put him in jail, and where he was beaten by border police.

As a foreigner herself, Jennifer wondered if the school could do something more to help Mohammed. She worried about his future. He was still young, but according to Italian law, when unaccompanied minors turn 18, they must prove to the authorities they are financially independent in order to stay in the country. Within the confines of the school, Mohammed's progress was undeniable, but would he be able to find a job in the "real" world? There were several obstacles impeding his chances at finding meaningful work in Italy: he was foreign, he had difficulty reading and writing, and even if it was considered "merely esthetic" by the national health service, a missing front tooth was much more than that. Could helping Mohammed get a new tooth improve his self-esteem and his job prospects? Small changes can have a big impact. Perhaps this could be a catalyst for a domino effect of other positive changes as well: increasing his trust in others, making him feel more confident in social situations, maybe even speeding up the process of integration. In the short term, however, the important thing was to help him get a job, achieve his personal objectives and stay in the country.

One thing was very clear. If Jennifer wanted to help Mohammed, she would have to ask for help. In other words, she would need to tap into other resources and create a "network of kindness" to research the problem, look for solution, find a way to pay for it, see if the client accepts it, and hope for the best.

### **CREATING A "LOVE LOTTERY"**

As a first step, Jennifer went to Sabrina, who taught Mohammed Italian as a Second Language. Within the school, Sabrina advocated on behalf of foreign students and was in frequent contact with their case workers outside the school. Together, Jennifer thought they could brainstorm how to mobilize their colleagues and raise funds to help Mohammed get a new tooth. They asked around to see if anyone knew a dentist who might be willing to take on Mohammed's case. It would have to be a highly-empathic person considering Mohammed's past trauma and the limited funds they could collect to help. Vito and Daniele, who also



worked with Mohammed, came on board to organize the fundraiser and the concept of a “Love Lottery” was born. Rather than soliciting cash donations, the fundraiser would be based on giving and receiving acts of kindness.

In order to buy tickets for the Love Lottery, participants had to donate an act of kindness. While not everyone understood exactly how the lottery would work, the entire staff put their doubts aside and donated acts of kindness and bought tickets to win acts of kindness from colleagues. Vito and Daniele created a spreadsheet to keep track of participants and the acts of kindness they donated. Some colleagues preferred showcasing their hobbies and interests by making a batch of homemade cookies, writing a personalized love letter or a special poem, creating a piece of art, taking a photograph, or creating a shared music playlist. Other “donations” were oriented towards spending quality time with the winner: a 30-minute walk on the bike path after school, a hot chocolate and a chat downtown, brunch, dinner, a beer, vegan food, etc.

On “Love Lottery Day,” the entire staff of CIOFS came together for the drawing. Prizes were raffled off and winners were recorded. Everyone was given a deadline to complete the act of kindness and submit a photo as proof. Almost immediately, selfies came pouring in to the school’s Whatsapp group and were later posted on a Love Lottery blog embedded into the school’s website and shared on Instagram. Common spaces buzzed with stories and Love Lottery experiences. Several participants noted a feeling of unity between colleagues that continued long after the end of the challenge. Others saw their colleagues in a new light because they discovered the “hidden” talents they normally did not have access to. In general, participants agreed that spending time together outside the traditional job context was rewarding, and that kindness begets wellbeing, a value added for an often-stressful job environment.

Besides the personal benefits felt by Love Lottery participants, there was an underlying sense of collective pride that together they could do something to help Mohammed and potentially create a tradition to help other students in the school community in the future.

Another indirect consequence of the Love Lottery was that staff members who had seen Mohammed in the hallways but did not work with him directly said they were moved by his story, admitting that hearing it made them more curious about other foreign students as well.

## **KINDNESS IS CONTAGIOUS**



While lottery participants were completing their acts of kindness, Sabrina remembered a dentist friend of hers with a “big heart” who might be sensitive to Mohammed’s situation. She knew that Dr. Crevatin had a local practice in Trieste and regularly organized trips to Bosnia to do pro bono dental work for people with disabilities, so she contacted him. When Dr. Crevatin and his assistant heard about the love lottery and how an entire school came together to help a student, they were inspired to donate their time to help as well.

Sabrina met with Mohammed because she wanted to involve him in the process as much as possible. Most importantly, she wanted to give him all the information she had and allow him to choose whether or not he wanted to be helped. Upon hearing the news, Mohammed was enthusiastic. “Finally!” he said. Together, they scheduled a visit with Dr. Crevatin.

A preliminary x-ray revealed a large piece of bone missing where Mohammed’s tooth had been and a fracture that ran up into his skull. It was at that point that he finally explained how he lost the tooth. It was at the border between Croatia and Slovenia, he said. He was chased by border police who prodded the refugees and yelled at them to hurry up, to go faster. He explained how they tripped him and he fell on his face, then they kicked him for several minutes while he was on the ground. The pain in his head and his legs was excruciating and he was thirsty. There was no one there to help him.

Because of the emotional and physical trauma Mohammed had experienced, Dr. Crevatin opted for the most non-invasive solution possible. While proceeds from the Love Lottery did not completely cover costs for the materials needed to make the tooth and the apparatus that would hold it in place, Dr. Crevatin said they could take as long as they needed to pay for the rest-- even if it took ten Love Lotteries!

## **A PANDEMIC INTERRUPTION**

In March, 2020, With the arrival of the Coronavirus, Italy was put into lockdown and all commercial activity and non-essential medical practices were interrupted. For this reason, Mohammed would not see his new tooth for another 18 months. In the meantime, however, as businesses and schools opened up again with new safety protocols, Mohammed’s self-confidence improved. For him, wearing a face mask was liberating rather than restrictive because it hid the missing tooth.



Mohammed finished his three-year program and got hired to work in a restaurant in a ski-resort in Northern Italy. He was fitted for the tooth three days before he left Trieste for his new job in the mountains. Before going, he stopped by the school to say hello to every teacher and staff member one at a time, say thank you, pull down his surgical mask and smile.

Not only did the Love Lottery raise money to help Mohammed get much-needed dental work, it raised his self-esteem and increased his sense of belonging. As the fundraiser was based on donations of “Acts of Kindness” by and for the school’s faculty and staff, it strengthened relationships between colleagues and raised awareness about the often-violent treatment of refugees in transit and became a yearly event on the school’s calendar. Later, during an interview for the present Case Study, when asked what the Love Lottery and his new tooth meant to him, Mohammed answered: “It meant everything. It changed everything. I am myself again, and this is a place where people really care.”

## Questions, comments and topics of discussion

1. How do you think the theme of collaboration contributed to the story of Mohammed?
2. In what ways was kindness “contagious” in the story?
3. In your opinion, was it right for Sabrina to involve Mohammed in the process when she did? Why or why not?
4. Put yourself in Mohammed’s shoes. Given his backstory, how would you react to news that the school wanted to help?
5. How does this story fit into the wider area of communication and collaboration?
6. In what ways does this story lend itself to digital content creation?
7. What are your initial reactions to the story? Is there anything you can apply to your own guidance practice? What and how?