

The following is a summary in English of Raghad Mshaweh's presentation in Finnish during the Stig In2 Conference 12.11.2021.

### Believe in yourself – Raghad Mshaweh

Raghad Mshaweh is a young 21-year-old woman from Syria. She moved to Mikkeli in Finland with her family in 2017 as a quota refugee and is currently studying to get her Finnish polytechnic level degree in Media and Visual Arts. She has always dreamed of becoming a reporter and working in media.

She shared her journey and her memories from her old, war-ravaged homeland Syria to her new homeland, Finland. Raghad highlights Mikkeli's Multicultural Center Mimosa as a very important and valuable place for her and many other immigrants like her. Mimosa also offered Raghad her first job and with it, also an insight into Finnish society and its people. Raghad compares Finns to coconuts - hard on the outside but soft on the inside. Patience, honesty, and clarity are other qualities she associates with Finnish people.

Raghad eagerly threw herself in learning Finnish, achieving Finnish fluency after a year. She was determined to continue with education in her chosen field, media studies, but often found herself discouraged in doing so by various counselors and supervisors. Their reasoning being that Finnish is a difficult language and media studies above her capabilities. She worked very hard not only to prove herself to the nay-sayers, but also to prove to herself that she could fulfill her dream. Instead of encouragement, she frequently was steered away from her chosen path. Raghad often felt diminished but did not give up and studied even harder.

Her experience from integration in the Finnish society is that immigrants are easily put into the same box. She pointed out that immigrants are all different; some learn more quickly and others require more time. Most importantly, they all have different dreams and aspirations, and different drives to fulfill their dreams – just like Finns. Raghad is currently continuing with her media studies and making the first steps in her chosen profession.

In telling her story, Raghad wanted to point out to the listeners, her experience of systemic injustices, often wrapped up in (unconscious?) ignorance or lack of understanding, resulting in the Finnish system not feeling as welcoming as one would hope. Especially after being chosen among so many. At the same time, Raghad pointed out in a very humble and wise way beyond her years, about how she has repeatedly fought for her dreams and urges everyone, regardless of background, to do everything to fulfill them. "Mikään ei voi tulla esteeksi hänelle, jolla on suuri tavoite." – She refuses to let anything hinder or stand in the way of her biggest dream!