

THE PRESENTATIONS OF THE INFOPANKKI USER PANEL MEMBERS

Irene Arnau is a nurse from Espoo who moved to Finland from Spain due to family reasons this year. Irene is hoping to find work in Finland in her own field and has already embarked on the further education she needs to help her fulfil her dream. She has had international work experience as a nurse, but this in itself was insufficient for finding work as a health professional in Finland. "I have the urge to help people and believe my own experience as an immigrant can be of benefit to others, too. The Infopankki online service proved an extremely useful tool for us while we were reshaping our lives here in Finland."

Describing himself as a Slav, 25-year old Anton Chernenko reveals that he is a second-generation immigrant. Though Anton is originally from Kazakhstan, his family background also embraces Ukraine, Czech Republic and Russia. Before moving to Finland Anton studied in Novosibirsk, Siberia, where he also met his wife. "We decided to move to Finland after I received a competitive job offer for work on a University of Helsinki research project, under which I will complete my four-year doctoral thesis. My aim is to raise awareness of Infopankki within the Russian-speaking community. Often Russian-speakers, on moving to Finland, have no command of either Finnish or English, and are therefore in need of information in their own language in the early stages. This service also stimulates the interest of immigrants in their new home country."

Ingrian Finn Marina Kinner, accompanied by her small children, arrived in Finland 12 years ago as a 31-year-old returnee from St. Petersburg. The Finnish and Russian-language teacher works at the Ministry of the Interior and has performed a variety of tasks at the former Ministry of Labour since as long ago as 1999. "I know through my own experience the multistep process every returnee goes through when moving to Finland. Even for a Finnish speaking returnee moving countries is large cause of stress. Not all the returnees know Finnish. Settling in a new country is different for every family member. The rules of the society are different than in the country of departure and in the previous culture. The Finns are the most difficult to understand when they remain silent. We must stay active – it helps in all life situations. In the Infopankki User's Panel work I want to share my knowledge of best practices of the of immigration situations I have experienced myself. In addition, through my work on the User's Panel my hope is to make many new friends."

Vantaa-based Sajiphan 'Poupe' Koponen hails from Thailand and first came to Finland 8 years ago to undergo practical training. After meeting her future husband, the landscape architect settled in Finland, and after a variety of assignments eventually decided to retrain as a community interpreter and translator in her own Thai language. "I was inspired to join the Infopankki User's Panel as Infopankki is a really useful website and I wanted the languages used to include Thai. I want to share my peer experience with other immigrants in Finland, as well as make use of the extensive knowledge I gained through community interpreting in developing Infopankki."

Terje Lepik, a 29-year-old pharmacist from Tallinn with a 2,5-year-old daughter, has been planning a move to Finland for some time. "As a member of the Infopankki User's Panel I hope to learn a lot about Finland, and I believe I can help to develop the service to respond better to the questions that concern immigrants. My goal in Finland is to study physiotherapy and find work in that field."

Jay Nanje is a social instructor from Espoo who arrived from Cameroon 5 years ago as a student. He met his wife in Finland and established a family here. "I would like to develop Infopankki to the extent where it can help immigrants to participate more closely in Finnish society, on the same level as other Finnish inhabitants. They need information and advice in order to function as complete members of this society. The Infopankki online service can be used as a tool for making Finland an even better place to live and work. My goal is to give hope to those who have already given up." Jay is also completing his diploma work on the subject of Info Bank and user-centricity.

Helsinki resident Martin-Éric Racine moved from Québec to Lappeenranta in 1998 due to his extensive language skills to work in the high-technology sector. Afterwards, he became actively involved in Finnish immigration policy and in international trade positions at several levels in several countries. "Nowadays I'm focusing my involvement on projects that facilitate immigrant integration and on taking initiatives towards simplifying the immigration legislation."

Mohsen Saadatmand from Helsinki moved to Finland 3 years ago from Iran to do his doctoral studies on technology applications in connection with education. The Persian-speaking family has lived in Vantaa and Helsinki, enjoying the proximity to nature and its abundant outdoor opportunities. "I want to be a part of Infopankki User's panel work because of its multicultural nature. Another important reason is that Infopankki is already a comprehensive information service on living, work and study relating topics to anyone moving to Finland. Recalling my early days in Finland, I didn't know how properly to go about finding a suitable apartment, transportation system, social services, information about student's life and supports and other services which support the lives of immigrants as well. Although I discovered Infopankki a little late, it still helped me to fashion a satisfying general picture of Finland. I have recommended the service as a prime source of information to many people with the same background as myself. I want to be part of Infopankki development to help ensure the service continues to provide all the necessary information."

Klaukkala resident Nicole Saari moved to Finland from Holland in 1997 for family reasons. "I want to help foreigners integrate more easily into Finnish society and also to improve our chances of obtaining all the right information in a straightforward way. My work as an entrepreneur in the relocation sector has taught me to be aware of the needs of many who move to Finland. "

Ala Saeed was born in Iraqi Kurdistan and moved to Hämeenlinna 11 years ago as a UN quota refugee. "I have been involved in projects supporting the social integration of immigrants for some years now. The Infopankki online service is of inestimable value to any refugee living in Finland. I was keen for myself to become a User's Panel member developing the service, as I want in particular to help immigrant women. These women require special attention for them to be able to take part in Finnish society while still respecting their own traditions."

Ahmet Sari from Helsinki came to Finland as a student at the Hanken School of Economics. "I still haven't learnt much Finnish, but I have managed pretty well in Finland using English. I hope that being a member of the Infopankki User's Panel will give me the motivation to learn the language. I want to get the message across that immigrants need things like Infopankki and many other kinds of support in order to adjust and settle in Finland." Ahmet does part-time work in a bar to finance his studies.

Tommy Sund, from Åland, lived for 12 years in Sweden before moving back to Finland on account of his Icelandic girlfriend's work. "I wanted to get on to the Infopankki User's Panel so that I could influence the design and content of this vital online service. As a graphic designer I believe I can not only bring the team know-how on usability, readability, navigation and search tools, but also ideas for the impending visual update. At the same time I am adding my Scandinavian and Swedish-speaking perspective to the team." Tommy also provides support to other User's Panel members in the adoption of the new social web-based tools.

Long Zhuoying arrived in Vaasa from Wuhan in China as a student in 2003, subsequently moving to Helsinki. "The Infopankki website is an excellent channel for obtaining information when starting life in Finland. Finnish and Chinese culture differs greatly. The most difficult challenge facing Chinese is integration into work and social life," says Long Zhuoying, who on top of her studies acts as a consultant in intercultural communication. "Discrimination leads to depression and a range of social problems. The Infopankki website is a good place for starting to talk about these issues. I want to help the Infopankki online service to achieve wider recognition."

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