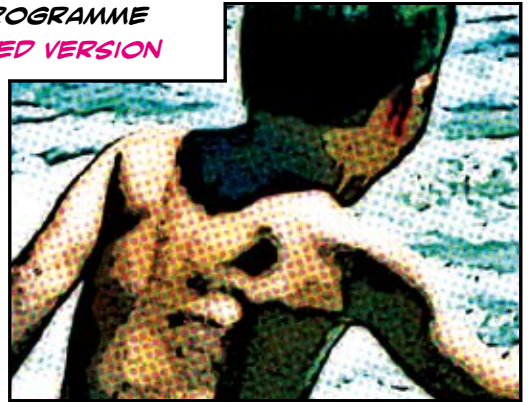
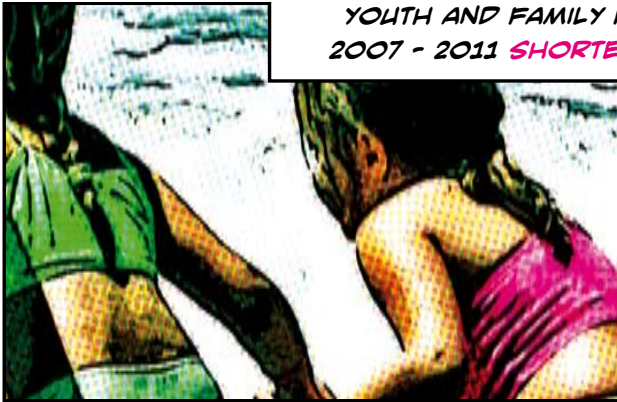


# Youth and Families

ministry



EVERY OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERY CHILD  
YOUTH AND FAMILY PROGRAMME  
2007 - 2011 **SHORTENED VERSION**





# EVERY OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERY CHILD

YOUTH AND FAMILY PROGRAMME

2007 - 2011 SHORTENED VERSION



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# FOREWORD

A country where children can grow up safely and healthy, develop their talents, enjoy themselves, learn to be good citizens and be properly equipped for the future: in short, a country where all children enjoy equal opportunities. That is the goal towards which the government wants to work during the forthcoming period.

Why have we set ourselves this goal? After all, the vast majority of young people and families in this country are doing well. According to international comparative surveys, Dutch children are rated among the happiest in the world. Clearly, we want to keep things that way. But at the same time we must not blind ourselves to some worrying trends: growing reports of child abuse, children with behavioural problems, the unhealthy lifestyle of some youngsters, the number of children who neither attend school nor work, and the increase in antisocial behaviour among the young.

Operation Young People and other initiatives have made it progressively clear in recent years that these problems must be tackled through a concerted effort. Moreover, this will only work if there is a genuine willingness to share information and achieve results together. 'We can do a lot, but we've got to make the effort.' This was the message delivered to the Minister for Youth and Families following a public debate on the subject. The ministries in The Hague, the municipal and provincial authorities, youth care institutions, schools and other stakeholders will therefore need to work together more closely.

The Minister for Youth and Families is responsible for formulating a child and family-friendly policy which is endorsed by parents, families, teachers, professional youth workers, municipalities and provinces alike. The Youth and Family Programme represents a new approach by the government: one which uses coordination, cooperation and a focus on the common good for the benefit of young people and families. One which accords the family its rightful place in society, focuses on prevention by identifying and tackling problems earlier and imposes binding commitments on all stakeholders.

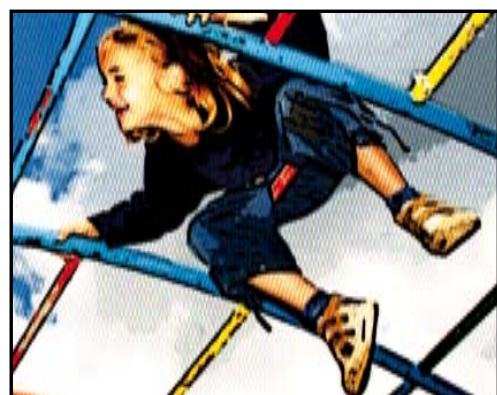
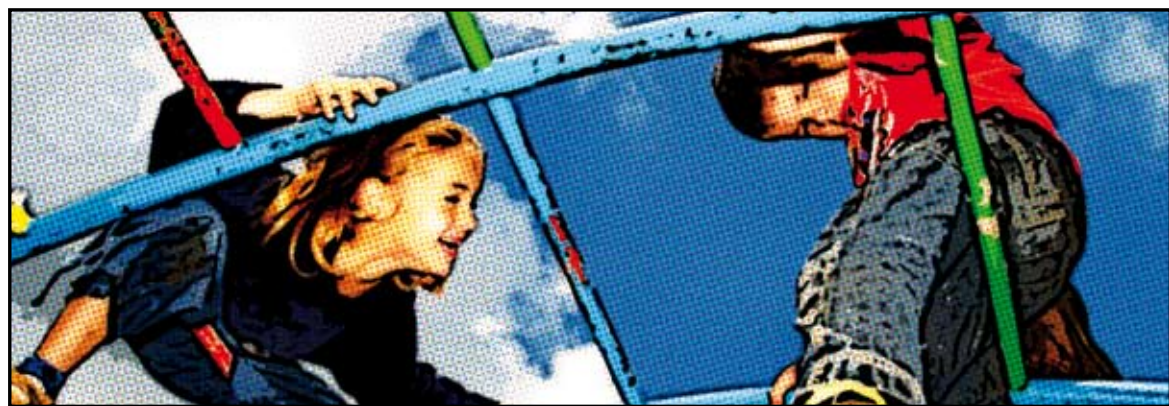


*André Rouvoet*  
Minister for Youth and Families





**AMBITION**



# PART I: AIM

## 1. A QUESTION OF UPBRINGING

All children and young people, regardless of their cultural background or physical and mental capacity, have the right to develop to their full potential. That is our aim, and one that is formally enshrined in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children are primarily raised at home within the family. However, the schools they attend, the neighbourhoods in which they grow up and the sport clubs they join also play a part in their upbringing. The professionals who deal with aspects of child-rearing, such as youth care workers and foster parents, also have a role to play. The Minister for Youth and Families seeks to bring cohesion to all these efforts, based on a shared view of how children should be raised.

Random surveys and interviews with focus groups representing parents, grandparents, professionals and young people show that there is considerable consensus in the Netherlands about the aims of child-rearing. These views are shared both by the indigenous population and by citizens of Antillean, Moroccan and Turkish origin. The survey's findings are shown below, and offer a practical guideline for all those involved with children, both privately and professionally.

Preconditions for the development of all children, regardless of cultural background or physical capabilities.

1. Healthy upbringing: physical and mental well-being, healthy lifestyle, continuity of upbringing and care.
2. Safe upbringing: security: unconditional love, respect, attention, boundaries, structure and regularity, a safe home (free from violence, mistreatment and sexual abuse) and a safe outdoor environment.
3. Contributing to society: social engagement: contributing ideas and taking part, active involvement in the local community, positive attitude and citizenship.
4. Developing talents and having fun: being educated or trained, opportunity to pursue hobbies: sport, culture and leisure pursuits, and freedom to play.
5. Being properly prepared for the future: obtaining a qualification, finding employment, capacity to earn a living, access to a stimulating environment.

Many children and families in the Netherlands are leading happy, well-balanced lives. This is confirmed by international comparative surveys. It is a situation we must strive to maintain. However, there are also children who are experiencing or causing problems. Parents, professionals and the government must work together to give them full attention. A noncommittal approach to such problems will no longer be accepted; everyone must now shoulder their responsibilities.

## 2. THREE PROGRAMME STRATEGIES

The government's new programme will consist of three strategies. First, we will seek to confirm the family's natural role in bringing up children. Second, we will concentrate on preventive action by identifying problems earlier and tackling them more effectively. Finally, we will no longer accept a permissive, noncommittal approach. Undesirable situations will not be allowed to continue; we will insist that everyone – parents, professionals and authorities alike – exercises their responsibilities.

We will also be examining the influence of different cultural backgrounds on children. After all, youth policy has to reach all children and parents to the same degree, regardless of their cultural background. It must be equally effective for all, and must therefore be professionally and qualitatively geared to accommodate social diversity. This requires targeted measures. The Minister for Housing, Communities and Integration and I are therefore drafting a four-year action programme, 'Diversity in youth policy', to be jointly implemented during the government's present term in office.

### 1. GROWING UP IS SOMETHING YOU DO IN A FAMILY

Families are important to society. Most children are raised in a family. A family is defined as 'any unit consisting of one or more adults who are responsible for raising and caring for one or more children'. Families come in many forms: some consist of several children, others of only one; some

have one parent or two, others combine children from previous relationships; some children are brought up by grandparents or foster parents.

In all these families, adults raise children and provide them with a secure environment. They impart key values and norms, create an atmosphere of reciprocal care and consideration and offer scope for personal development and recreation. To do all this, parents need sufficient time, resources and skills.

The government is promoting this through a family-friendly policy. Not only does a properly functioning family provide a stable background for growing children, it also makes a positive contribution to society, schools and neighbourhoods.

To improve the lives of young people, it is necessary to exploit and consolidate the resources families have at their disposal. The Youth and Family Programme does this in the following ways:

- ✓ Parenting support will be offered to all families. A Dutch Family Council survey in 2005 concluded that today's parents find parenting more difficult than their predecessors. A national network of youth and family centres will therefore be created by 2011 to provide advice and help on parenting at neighbourhood level.
- ✓ The problems of individual families will be tackled using the 'one family, one plan' approach. This will take the form of

an overall plan which addresses all the problems being experienced by a family, with a single point of contact for family members and care workers. Children with problems often come from families with problems. These must be tackled concurrently, with one care worker in charge of overall coordination.

- ✓ Parents will be given a means-tested child allowance so as to minimise financial obstacles to adequate child-rearing.
  - ✓ Families will be given help to resolve their debt problems. They will not be disconnected from basic utilities such as electricity, water and gas, or evicted from their home unless prior arrangements have been made for the children.
  - ✓ Parents and children will be given the opportunity to take part in sports as well as creative and educational activities at local community schools. It is in the interests of children for families to find a balance between child-rearing, income generation and personal development of parents.
  - ✓ Measures will be taken to exploit the inherent strength of families, wider family networks and local communities. Intensive use will be made of the Family Group Conference approach, in which a joint plan is devised enabling families to rely on their own networks of relatives, friends and neighbours for support.
  - ✓ Lone parent families and families affected by divorce or separation can turn to youth and family centres for specific advice and help in bringing up their children. Divorcing couples must draw up a parenting plan containing agreements about their children's upbringing to ensure continuity of a stable home life.
  - ✓ Community schools, youth and family centres and other local facilities offering advice and support on parenting will make a specific effort to target culturally isolated families of ethnic origin.
  - ✓ Families with serious parenting and child-rearing problems will be given appropriate help quickly. If children need to be temporarily placed in a residential institution or with a foster family, their parents will be given help to resume their upbringing once this period has ended.
  - ✓ If a child has no prospect of lasting security and stability with his own parents and therefore cannot continue living in the parental home, he will be transferred to a foster family.
  - ✓ Fostering is an alternative for children who cannot live with their own parents, and is thus a viable form of youth care. Financial restrictions preventing people from fostering must therefore be removed.
-



## II. FOCUS ON PREVENTION: IDENTIFYING AND TACKLING PROBLEMS EARLIER

The need for specialist help for children has continued to rise in recent years. Not only has demand for provincial youth care services, special education, mental health care and care for children with moderate learning difficulties increased, so has the number of young people applying for disability benefit. Delinquents are also getting younger.

Clearly, we must identify and address the problems of children and families as early as possible, to prevent them from becoming more serious when they grow older.

Essentially, this calls for a focus on prevention; early identification, and above all, early intervention:

- ✓ A healthy, balanced upbringing for children before the age of four, since this is the best way of ensuring that they do not develop problems when they grow older. The youth healthcare services will therefore conduct a growth and development risk assessment for each child during its first four years. Help will then be given where necessary. Interventions can range from parenting support, provision of early childhood education programmes and community school activities to a youth care order.
- ✓ Professionals will be given the training they need to recognise developmental problems in children and the dysfunctions associated with violence and sexual abuse.
- ✓ All professionals working with children must share and be given access to existing information on a child or family which may be relevant to their health and safety. An electronic child database and a register of at-risk juveniles will help in this. Relevant information on children below the age of four will generally be held by the youth healthcare services. Most children aged four and above go to school on a daily basis and at this stage it is the school that is usually the first to identify any problems. Schools will be given relevant information about a particular child and its family, as will professional youth care workers.
- ✓ Schools are in a good position to draw attention to behavioural and developmental problems, enabling social workers, youth care or youth healthcare workers to intervene quickly where necessary.
- ✓ If an adolescent nevertheless develops problems during or after secondary education, a sound strategy must be found to ensure that he can still obtain a basic qualification and find a job. Social or youth care services must be made available to these youngsters at the earliest opportunity.
- ✓ Young people should be encouraged to contribute to a positive youth culture, promoting safe, healthy development, good citizenship and the nurturing of talent.

### III BINDING COMMITMENTS

Solving the problems of children and families requires input from many different stakeholders: parents, professionals, official bodies and young people themselves.

Undesirable situations cannot be allowed to continue. Everyone must take responsibility if there are signs that a child or family is in difficulty. Simply monitoring the situation, providing an ad hoc response or even turning a blind eye is no longer acceptable. We are all responsible, and we must all call each other to account. Everyone will now be expected to play their part.

There are many advisory reports on youth and families, proposing many solutions. These solutions are already being implemented in some parts of the Netherlands. It is now time to extend them to the rest of the country.

#### A PARENTS

- ✓ Parents are primarily responsible for raising their own children. Where they need help, this will be given. If the safety, health or development of their children is at risk, they will be obliged to accept help. Those reluctant to do so will be actively encouraged or, if necessary, legally required to work with professionals to improve their parenting skills.
- ✓ Where necessary, a judge will issue a temporary or permanent court order superseding the parent's authority. In the most extreme cases, this could result in the child being permanently transferred to a foster family.
- ✓ Children who are temporarily removed from their parents will be given a final decision about where they will spend the remainder of their childhood (with their own parents or in a foster family) within two years. The stability and security of the child takes precedence over the parents' right to bring up their own children.
- ✓ It is vital that parents create a good balance between family life and work. If this balance is achieved, earning a living need not compromise care and child-rearing. Government policy supports efforts to achieve this balance, especially where young children are involved.

#### B PROFESSIONALS

- ✓ Professionals play a crucial role in youth and family policy, given that it is they who translate it into practice. The success of such work depends largely on the individuals who carry it out.
- ✓ The 'one family, one plan' model will be adopted for families receiving help from multiple organisations. This applies to all situations: parenting, youth health care, youth care, education, housing, employment, debt or security. As soon as two or more organisations begin providing assistance to one family, they must automatically come together to plan a joint strategy, with one in overall charge of coordination.

- ✓ In situations involving serious parenting and development problems and/or child abuse, a family or child will be given help within the agreed guidelines. In the event of a crisis situation where a child is in immediate danger, help will be given within 24 hours. The government has asked the sector to re-examine its maximum waiting times and to set new guidelines.
  - ✓ Decisions to apply a child protection order must be taken within two months. In more urgent cases, decisions can be taken within a week and in crisis situations, within 24 hours.
  - ✓ Parents and children can apply to a single helpdesk for different types of assistance.
  - ✓ Organisations that work with the same child or family consecutively will use the same information and consult the same studies and questionnaires. No additional surveys, intake forms or questionnaires will be used.
  - ✓ Where necessary, care will come directly to children and parents. Rather than continually being referred on, they will be given assistance in the most effective location, which might be the school, the youth and family centre, the home or the community centre.
  - ✓ Schools have a statutory duty to teach children of compulsory school age. The same applies to adolescents who have moved back to a region following a period in residential care or a young offenders' institution. Schools are also obliged to do everything they can to keep pupils in school.
  - ✓ Parallel to this are the youth and family centres and youth care institutions (open and secure), accommodation for young people with mild learning difficulties and mental health care institutions, which also have a duty to provide care for young people in a particular area.
  - ✓ Clear agreements will be made about the after-care of young people accommodated and/or being treated in an institution: organising a school place or job for them, providing them with a safe place to live, preparing family members for their return, arranging peripatetic care.
  - ✓ Where adults have mental problems, a drug or alcohol dependency or are imprisoned or detained, the care services will always seek to establish whether they have children, and if so, make appropriate arrangements, such as placing them with relatives or a foster family.
- C YOUNG PEOPLE**
- ✓ Young people who engage in antisocial behaviour will be severely dealt with. The strategy applied will focus on the whole of an individual's environment: his family, school, friends and acquaintances. Any measures imposed will be binding.
  - ✓ Persistent offenders who cannot be trained or employed in the normal way and who are at risk of sliding into a life of crime will be transferred to special campuses for re-education, training and employability.
  - ✓ All young people below the age of 18 must obtain a basic qualification. They must therefore be in full-time or part-time education or they must have a job,



or a combination of both. If they need extra help, for instance in the form of combined education and care facilities, this will be provided.

- ✓ The number of young people who are exercising regularly and have a healthy body weight is growing.
- ✓ Excessive drinking among young people is declining.
- ✓ Young people are contributing to society through voluntary work, non-profit placements (for instance helping members of ethnic minorities to find their feet in Dutch society) and involvement in local decision-making.
- ✓ All Dutch municipalities are involving young people in decisions about how to improve the quality of life in their local neighbourhood.

#### **D GOVERNMENT**

- ✓ Municipalities play a crucial role in youth and family policy as the guardians of the conditions needed for children's development. They conclude agreements with the Minister for Youth and Families about specific ways they can contribute to the Youth and Family Programme. In addition to running the youth and family centres, their work includes identifying and reporting instances of child abuse, implementing aspects of family policy, creating a child-friendly environment and promoting citizenship among young people. Ideally, this is done through a member of the municipal executive with specific responsibility for youth and families.
- ✓ By the end of the government's present term of office, there will be a national network of youth and family centres. The electronic child database system will become operational on 1 January 2008 and the register of at-risk juveniles will be up and running from 1 January 2009.
- ✓ Municipalities conclude agreements with the provincial authorities and metropolitan regions about ways to guarantee effective cooperation and coordination.
- ✓ The government supports and promotes local pilot projects in which new forms of cooperation between provinces and municipalities are being developed. In mid-2009, it will assess the progress being made by these projects and in efforts to streamline youth care, and will decide whether further agreements are needed.
- ✓ The provinces are taking active steps to provide prompt, effective help for young people and families. Reducing waiting lists and pursuing effective interventions are key to this strategy. Other initiatives include measures to tackle child abuse and improve youth protection. The provincial authorities play an important role in youth policy by ensuring that the five development goals for children are upheld, even in alternative child-rearing situations, such as foster families and residential institutions.
- ✓ The provincial authorities are concluding agreements with the Minister for Youth and Families to provide timely, effective youth care, simplify assessment procedures, encourage participation by young people in youth care, tackle child abuse and improve youth protection and professionalisation.

### 3. PULLING TOGETHER: THE WORK PROGRAMME

We know what we want to offer each child in terms of a sound upbringing: the ability to grow up safely and healthy, develop their talents, enjoy themselves, learn to be good citizens and be properly equipped for the future. To achieve this, we have outlined an ambitious strategy consisting of good basic provisions which offer children a safe, healthy and stimulating environment and encourage them to participate in society, regardless of their cultural background. We will also try to identify problems early and give prompt, effective help close to home which is accessible to parents and children alike. An approach that is centred on the family, based on the 'one family, one plan' approach, and where all stakeholders are expected to pull together.

To find out how things stand and whether we are making progress, we will need to take stock of how children and families are doing. This will be done using the Youth Monitor, which was developed for Operation Young People and gauges the well-being of young people throughout the Netherlands. Key indicators will include the percentage of young people with a drink problem, the proportion who are being mistreated, who are the subject of a youth protection order, who are arrested for antisocial behaviour and who are engaged in voluntary work, plus the number of young people between 18 and 24 who leave school without a basic qualification.

Many of these indicators can be subdivided into municipal and provincial data and classified according to cultural background. Each authority can then use the results to set their own priorities and steer policy in accordance with individual responsibilities. The situation of children in a metropolis like Amsterdam, for example, differs markedly in some respects to that of children in a small provincial town like Bennekom, and therefore requires a different approach.

To achieve this, we will need to work with many stakeholders over the coming years, and consolidate each other's efforts. Our strategy is divided into nine themes. These are outlined in Part II: the work programme. The work programme is an invitation to everyone who works with and for young people to get involved and make a contribution: parents, professionals, the authorities, researchers and young people themselves. Only by pulling together can we realise our goals. This is our duty to young people as a whole, and to each and every child in particular.

**WHAT WILL  
WE DO?**



# PART II: THE WORK PROGRAMME

## 1. THE FAMILY IN FOCUS

Families play a crucial role in society: by ensuring that their children are properly equipped for the future, they will benefit society as a whole. The government's job is to create the right conditions for families to operate successfully and for parents to exercise their responsibility as carers and child-rearers. If there are problems in a family, and more than one care and support service is involved, the 'one family, one plan' model will be applied. Organisations will need to keep each other informed. One of them will be responsible for coordinating the assistance provided, so that care professionals and individual family members have a single point of contact with a general overview of the care being provided.

More attention will be given to at-risk families, such as ethnic minority families who are culturally isolated from the rest of Dutch society. Divorce also has major repercussions for parents and children. Additional measures will therefore be needed to accommodate these effects. New laws on divorce and parental access will be brought in. Ways of improving work-parenthood combinations will be examined, as will the question of whether there is a need for extra child maintenance provisions and supplementary incomes policy/child-related schemes. A new policy document on the government's family policy will be presented in 2008.

### What we will do:

- Present a bill introducing a means-tested allowance for children as of 2009. In the meantime, in 2008, each household will receive a fixed allowance not based on the number of children.
- Introduce a parenting plan and measures to alleviate the effects of divorce on children.
- Explore supplementary incomes policy/child-related schemes such as abolishing the job-search requirement for sole-parent benefit claimants with children aged up to five, and introducing an allowance for single-earner households with a chronically sick or disabled child or foster child.
- Provide accessible, locally available advice on parenting.
- Extend statutory parental leave for all employees from 13 to 26 weeks.



## 2. LOCALLY AVAILABLE PARENTING AND DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORT

All parents, young people and children, including those without specific problems, must have access to an approachable, recognisable point of contact close to home where they can get advice and help on a wide range of parenting issues. Professionals who work extensively with children and families must be alert to any problems and notify the relevant bodies at an early stage if families need help. In other words, if several organisations are working with a single family, they must jointly compile a plan indicating which of them is responsible for overall coordination.

### YOUTH AND FAMILY CENTRES

In order to achieve this, youth and family centres will be set up. There will be a centre in every municipality; larger municipalities will have more than one, while smaller municipalities will have the option of setting up one shared regional centre. Every centre will offer basic preventive youth policy services, youth health care, developmental support and family coaching. The municipalities will be responsible for setting up the youth and family centres, including concluding agreements on how to coordinate the care provided.

Related sectors, such as youth care and education, will need to work together in developing youth and family centres. It has been agreed with the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) that municipalities will encourage the youth care offices to act as outposts for the youth and family centres,

and that cooperation at municipal and provincial level will be intensified. Based on local needs, the municipalities must decide for themselves which other bodies and functions might be attached to the centres, or with which bodies and functions links may be needed, e.g. obstetric services, GPs, debt relief services and the police. The first centres will open their doors in autumn 2007. A national network will be created within four years.

#### What we will do:

- by 2011: create a national network of youth and family centres, and merge relevant funding flows. The provincial youth care offices and services will tie in closely with this initiative.
- by 2011: give children, young people and their parents prompt, effective support.
- An extra € 220 million will be allocated to the youth and family centres in 2011, € 20 million of which will be earmarked for the electronic child database and the register for at-risk juveniles. This amounts to a total of € 441 million for setting up the youth and family centres (agreement with the Association of Netherlands Municipalities).

## COOPERATION

In recent years, pupil support advisory teams (ZATs) have achieved positive results through interdisciplinary cooperation. In them, professionals representing a wide range of disciplines (pupil counsellors, social workers, youth healthcare services, youth care, school attendance officers and the police) work together. They conclude agreements to help young people who have, or who are suspected of having, emotional, behavioural, developmental and/or school-related problems. During the forthcoming period, the government will examine how the pupil support advisory teams and the youth and family centres can join forces to guarantee swift, effective support for children and young people.

### What we will do:

- 2007: develop guidelines on how youth and family centres and pupil support advisory teams should work together.
- 2007 - 2008: promote the establishment of such teams and improve their performance.
- 2011: pupil support advisory teams to provide 100% coverage for all age groups.

# DEVELOP

## REGISTER OF AT-RISK JUVENILES AND ELECTRONIC CHILD DATABASE

A register of at-risk juveniles has been developed, and an electronic child database will be introduced for use by youth healthcare services, to allow early identification and effective information exchange. The register compiles all indications that a juvenile may be at risk. If more than one indication is registered, notifiers are sent each other's contact details so that they can discuss ways to coordinate their efforts.

The electronic child database is a national computerised system that will replace the paper dossiers used by the youth healthcare services. It allows health professionals to identify risks more quickly and monitor at-risk children. Both systems (the register of at-risk juveniles and the electronic child database) make it easier for juveniles and families to get the support they need. In addition, youth and family privacy helpdesks have been set up to help answer questions on privacy and the exchange of information.

### What we will do:

- Electronic child database to be up and running from 1 January 2008 and the register of at-risk juveniles from 1 January 2009.
- All youth healthcare services, including the youth and family centres, to use the electronic child database from 2009.
- Create a statutory basis for the electronic child database and at-risk register.
- Compile national privacy guidelines.



### 3. YOUTH CULTURE: HEALTHY AND ENGAGED

Most young people are leading healthy, well-balanced lives. However, a great many others smoke, drink too much, too young and too often, regularly experiment with or take drugs, engage in unprotected sex, eat poor diets and take too little exercise. They are investing in an unhealthy future. Parents are primarily responsible for ensuring that their children grow up healthy. Unfortunately, many fail to set a good example. That is why they need to be educated about healthy nutrition and responsible drinking, and encouraged to adopt healthier child-rearing practices. Additionally, duties on alcohol and tobacco will be raised, in order to discourage consumption.

Getting plenty of exercise is part of a healthy lifestyle. Young people from ethnic minority backgrounds tend to be less involved in sport. The programme 'Promoting integration through sport' is designed to change that. One specific aspect of a healthy lifestyle has to do with the 'digitisation' of society. In consultation with agencies specialising in media awareness, we are looking at how a healthy digital lifestyle can be encouraged.

#### **What we will do:**

- Actively target parents with advice and help on parenting in cases where the health of young children is endangered by their upbringing.
- Raise duties on alcohol and tobacco, as proposed in the 2008 tax plan.
- Persuade more youngsters from ethnic backgrounds to take up sport through the programme 'Promoting integration through sport', which will run from 2007 to 2010.
- Tackle excessive alcohol consumption by the young.
- Put the prevention strategy into practice together with the Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport.

# HEALTHY

# PARTICIPATE

## YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Young people in the Netherlands must be given the opportunity to put forward their views, participate in decision-making and above all, play a role in society, regardless of their cultural background or physical and mental capabilities. Good examples of how young people can participate in society include district youth councils, neighbourhood events organised by the young, voluntary work and participation in debates on discrimination and intolerance. Participation in the family is also important.

Non-profit placements are a key supplement to this. These placements, which take place during school hours, are primarily designed to familiarise young people with the society in which they live and to encourage them to make a contribution to it. The government wants all young people to experience a placement. The new Social Support Act will include a key role for the municipalities in promoting youth participation. The Minister for Youth and Families will present an annual award to the municipality that comes up with the best youth participation initiative.

The Youth Care Act states that if a child has its own income, it must contribute to the costs of its own care. This regulation has long been criticised, on the grounds that the contributory element discourages young people from taking on holiday jobs, newspaper rounds, et cetera and obstructs the provision of care. The government will therefore be abolishing the contributory element in the Youth Care Act.

### What we will do:

- Introduce non-profit placements, so that by 2011 all children at secondary school will have to do a placement, for example in the form of voluntary work.
- Encourage youth programmes run by and with young people (National Youth Council, volunteer schemes, etc).
- Conclude agreements with municipalities on ways to promote youth participation.
- From 2008, present an annual youth award to the municipality with the best youth participation initiative.
- Abolish the contributory element for youth care in the Youth Care Act.

## 4. CHILD-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

A healthy, balanced upbringing requires a stimulating, child-friendly and therefore safe and secure environment. A child-friendly environment begins with a good home. But it also requires safe footpaths and cycle tracks, a clean and secure outdoor environment, plus facilities offering leisure activities, adequate sport and cultural provisions and accessible green space.

Municipalities play a crucial role in the creation of child-friendly environments. Together with housing associations they will do as much as they can to prevent the eviction of families with children, and to find adequate child-friendly accommodation. In addition, guidelines have been drawn up for municipalities, specifying that at least 3% of land in residential areas must be set aside for playgrounds and recreation areas. The views of young people are an important gauge of the child-friendliness of a particular environment.

### What we will do:

- By 2011, require all municipalities to have a means of consulting young people, partly with a view to creating a child-friendly environment.
- Require the government and municipalities to conclude agreements on how the latter should go about creating a child-friendly environment, in line with the administrative agreement between them.
- Monitor progress in applying the guideline which specifies that 3% of land in designated housing zones should be set aside for playing fields and playgrounds.
- To be attractive, neighbourhoods should be child-friendly. The charters drawn up by the government and municipalities for the 40 most deprived neighbourhoods will specify how the neighbourhood approach and the Youth and Family Programme should interact (to supplement the work of youth and family centres and community schools).
- Conclude agreements to extend the role and responsibilities of housing associations in supplying and managing multifunctional housing, outdoor play areas and accommodation for young people in consultation with Aedes, the federation of housing associations.



## 5. FAST, EFFECTIVE HELP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

If children and parents are to be given prompt, effective help with parenting and development problems, the youth care system needs to be simplified. Where several care organisations are involved, they need to collaborate in a professional way. This applies to cooperation between, for example, provincially-funded youth care, secure youth care, care for children with mild learning difficulties, municipal youth healthcare services and schools. Young people cannot simply be passed from pillar to post. Instead, the care must come to them (or to the institution where they are being accommodated).

Organisations responsible for referrals must pre-select clients quickly, effectively and accurately. Municipal care and education services, referral bodies, care providers and schools must work together to ensure that this is done. We will also look into permitting GPs in the youth healthcare sector to make direct referrals for specialist medical treatment.

### What we will do:

- Encourage provinces, municipalities, youth care institutions, institutions paid for through the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act and schools to conclude binding agreements to simplify the system of care for young people, for example through the development and availability of intersectoral care provision.
- Remove obstacles in implementing regulations.
- Set up a system of secure youth care by converting a number of young offenders' institutions into secure youth care institutions and creating new capacity, so that by 2010 young people with behavioural problems referred to secure youth care institutions will no longer be placed in the same young offenders' institutions as those detained for criminal offences.
- Support the implementation of the integrated referral framework so that by 2009 assessment procedures for special education, youth care and care funded through the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act will be harmonised, and the integrated referral framework will have been adopted by the relevant referral agencies.
- Implement follow-up measures to simplify assessment procedures.

## IMPROVING YOUTH PROTECTION

If the youth care services cannot provide assistance because parents and/or children turn down the help they need, the government will have to intervene, possibly by applying for a child protection order. If such a measure is granted, it must be applied effectively: decisions must be taken promptly and help must be given quickly, effectively and professionally. In future, children who are temporarily removed from the family home under a child protection order will be told much sooner whether they are to be returned to their parents or brought up elsewhere. The aim is for the child, its parents and any foster parents to be given a firm decision within two years. This is crucial to ensure continuity of upbringing. The rule of thumb is 'fewer formalities, more stability'.

The Better Protection programme was launched by the previous government to improve the quality of youth protection. The government will work quickly to complete the programme and the results will then be applied throughout the Netherlands.

National time limits for decisions on child protection orders will be introduced next year, and in 2010 new laws will be adopted. They will allow a more customised approach to the measures applied to children and families. Speed and customisation alone are not enough, however. A professional approach is also vital. The 'Delta method' of family supervision will be introduced at the end of 2008. In the same year, a new working method will be developed for family supervisors and applied by 2010 at the latest.

### What we will do:

As part of the Better Protection programme:

- the 'Delta method' for family supervision orders will be fully implemented by 2008, including reducing the caseload for family supervisors to 15 cases per FTE;
- the length of the decision-making process for youth protection will be reduced to an agreed standard by 2009: intervention within 24 hours in crisis situations. Non-urgent child protection orders to be issued within a week;
- revised laws on child protection orders will be applied by 2010.

Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers below the age of 12 will be placed with foster families approved by Nidos, an agency that provides youth care services and organises foster care for young refugees. Older children will be housed in reception centres run by the Central Reception Organisation for Asylum Seekers (COA). Instances of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers failing to return to reception centres has led to pilot projects with secure reception centres.

## REDUCING WAITING AND PROCESSING TIMES

Demand for youth care has risen sharply in recent years. In 2005, the number of young people relying on provincially-funded youth care was two-thirds higher than in 2000. The government has asked the youth care sector to reduce the maximum standard waiting time for referred youth care, which currently stands at nine weeks. Until then, agencies will be closely monitored to ensure that they keep to the nine-week deadline.

Simplifying the youth care system is also crucial to reducing waiting times, as is increased efficiency. Extra funding will be made available to absorb the growth in demand. In 2007, the government will allocate an extra € 30 million to the provinces and metropolitan areas, in addition to the extra € 40 million in structural funding provided at the beginning of this year.

The new funding system is another key element. It will be based on an assessment model which measures demand for youth care. Resources can then be matched to needs. The new system should become operational from 1 January 2009.

### What we will do:

- Ensure that the youth care sector reviews its maximum waiting times and draws up new standards. Until then, they will remain as previously agreed.
- Introduce an integrated approach to prevention, simplification of the youth care system and increased efficiency. Extra funding will be made available.
- Introduce a new funding system with effect from 1 January 2009.

## GATHERING AND DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT EFFECTIVE NOTIFICATION TOOLS AND INTERVENTIONS

Doing what works: that is what youth care is all about. If we can identify what works, we will be able to help more children and families without the need for extra spending. That is why a programme for effective youth care has been developed, to run from 2007 to 2013. The aim is to develop professional expertise to protect and promote the psychological and social development of the young where it is under threat.

### What we will do:

- Create an efficient database containing a list of proven methods and programmes.
- Apply the methods and programmes with the highest effectiveness scores.

## 6. TACKLING CHILD ABUSE

It is not simply a question of protecting children from abuse; abuse must be prevented from happening in the first place. The youth and family centres will play an important role in this. Parents must be given support to prevent their inability to cope with child-rearing from leading to child abuse.

As well as preventing child abuse, we must also identify and halt existing abuse as soon as possible, as well as doing our utmost to limit its harmful effects. RAAK, an action group dedicated to tackling child abuse, has drawn up a series of key guidelines for preventing, reporting and halting child abuse.

### **What we will do:**

- Apply the RAAK method nationally by 2011.
- Ensure that the Advice and Reporting Centres for Child Abuse and Neglect (AMKs) and the Child Protection Board can absorb the rise in the number of notifications through a properly coordinated working method and additional funding.
- Introduce a new maximum duration for AMK investigations, to be decided with the Association of Provincial Authorities (IPO) and the employers' association for the youth care sector, and laid down in an amendment to the Youth Care Act Implementing Decree.
- Introduce a standard processing time for decisions on child protection orders (following the introduction of the Better Protection programme).
- Ensure that professionals who work with children use the same child abuse checklist. Training in how to use the checklist is an important part of this.

# SAFE

## 7. FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

All young people need to be properly prepared for the future. Ensuring a smooth transition from school to work is essential. The government is working hard to devise an effective strategy for school-leavers. Using a new approach, it aims to halve the number of early school-leavers. The government will also be taking steps to introduce compulsory combined work and learning programmes for young people up to 27 years, coupled with the possibility of benefit deductions, where appropriate.

All pupils have the right to a high-quality education that is appropriate to their needs. At the moment, due to the complexity of the system, there are still too many pupils who are not being given the education that is most appropriate to their needs. That is why we need a broad, inclusive system country-wide, with enough flexibility for a customised approach at regional level.

Youngsters who have no immediate prospect of training or employment and cannot be reached by conventional means must also be offered an alternative in the form of a national network of campuses that will deliver re-education, training and employability skills. At the same time these campuses will aim to help attain a 10% reduction in youth crime, by for instance preventing young people who have committed minor offences from sliding into recidivism.

### What we will do:

- 'Tackling dropout'; a new approach designed to halve the number of early school-leavers.
- Introduce a compulsory combined work and learning scheme for young people up to 27.
- Introduce a broad, inclusive system countrywide to ensure appropriate education.
- Set up a national network of campuses by 2011, including putting in place the necessary legal framework.

# FUTURE



## 8. PREVENTING YOUTH CRIME

Just as in the case of child abuse, tackling youth crime is all about prevention. All the measures described in this work programme will help to prevent youth crime. If they are successful, they will help to reduce the incidence of juvenile delinquency, in conjunction with existing policy. The government will also redouble its efforts to put in place a programme to fight youth crime, as part of its 'Safety starts with prevention' strategy. Like parents, municipalities have an important role to play in preventing youth crime. They will identify which groups of youngsters are most likely to develop criminal tendencies.

The policy for dealing with young people who engage in risky or excessive behaviour works on a sliding scale. It starts with voluntary cooperation and, if this is unsuccessful, moves on to the application of pressure and ultimately to coercive measures. The relevant agencies will always begin by establishing whether the parents and/or the child are willing to accept parenting support, youth care or other forms of assistance voluntarily. If not, more persuasive measures will be applied, and the family may, under certain circumstances, be forced to cooperate.

The police and criminal justice authorities are called in whenever young people engage in antisocial behaviour (often as part of a group) or have committed a crime. The government is preparing a bill which will enable municipalities to respond more swiftly to delinquent behaviour, for example by imposing restraining orders or contact restrictions.

### **What we will do:**

- Reduce youth crime by 10%, in line with the 'Safety starts with prevention' strategy.
- Disseminate information on the risk factors leading to youth crime.
- Apply a sliding scale of instruments (escalating from voluntary assistance through persuasion to coercion) effectively. Call parents to account for their children's behaviour.
- Consult the municipal authorities of the Netherlands' four largest cities to see if additional measures are required.

## 9. PROFESSIONALISATION

Working with and on behalf of children and families calls for dedicated experts. And that means investing in quality. We must treat these professionals with care. We want them to feel a lasting commitment to the youth sector rather than being swiftly disappointed and turning their backs on it.

There are four key priorities for youth care during the forthcoming period:

1. making professional qualifications more transparent: what knowledge and skills are needed to work in the sector?
2. improving training
3. ensuring that all workers in the sector belong to a professional association
4. introducing disciplinary and review procedures for the sector.

A steering group on professionalisation has been established, consisting of representatives from the relevant professional bodies and employers' association, the Council for Higher Professional Education and the National Youth Care Client Forum.

The steering group members have drawn up an action plan in which they have agreed to implement the aforementioned four priorities over the coming years.

### What we will do:

- Ensure there is less red tape by 2011: professionals will spend less time on paperwork and more time giving practical help to young people and families, making their work more enjoyable.
- Arrange for institutions of higher professional education to offer subjects that are more relevant to youth care.
- Make professional qualifications more transparent: define the knowledge and skills needed to work in the sector.
- Improve the alignment of basic training and professional practice.
- Strengthen professional bodies through the introduction of a professional code of conduct and registration.
- Establish a disciplinary review body to maintain quality standards in the sector.
- Ensure an adequate supply of highly trained professionals to reflect and respond to diversity in the youth sector.

**TO BE  
CONTINUED?**



## PART III: THE NEXT STEP

The government has set itself the ambitious goal of ensuring that every child in the Netherlands has a balanced upbringing and that families get prompt, effective help where they need it. It seeks to achieve this together with parents, professionals, municipalities, provinces and young people themselves. It also wants to work with, and learn from, other countries.

One of the most important frameworks for the Youth and Family Programme is the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Dutch policy programme represents further implementation of that convention. The Netherlands hopes to discuss its third progress report on the implementation of the convention with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva in mid-2008.

Together with the Minister for Housing, Communities and Integration, the Minister for Youth and Families is drafting a four-year action programme, 'Diversity in youth policy', to be implemented during the government's current term in office.

The Youth Monitor was developed in the context of Operation Young People. It uses various indicators to gauge the well-being of children and families. The results obtained show whether they are doing well enough or if the policy needs adjusting in certain respects. The first version of the Youth Monitor will be available in 2007.

An ambitious programme for youth and families calls for shared goals on the part of central government, municipalities, provinces and professionals. These parties will therefore draw up a common agenda for the next four years, containing agreements on content, monitoring methods and supervision.

### **What we will do:**

- Set up a four-year action programme, 'Diversity in youth policy'.
- Set up a working system to monitor the condition of young people and families.
- Oversee the Youth and Family Programme.
- Ensure that dialogue continues.







A country where children can grow up safely and healthy, develop their talents, enjoy themselves, learn to be good citizens and be properly equipped for the future: in short, a country where all children enjoy equal opportunities. That is the goal towards which the government wants to work during the forthcoming period.

The Minister for Youth and Families is responsible for a pro-child and family policy, which is carried by parents, families, teachers, professional social workers, along with local and county authorities. With this public version of the program for Youth and Families 'Every opportunity for every child' the cabinet deliberately chooses for a new approach, which leads to teamwork and cooperation in the interest of youth and family.

This is an approach which puts the family in a strong position and focuses on prevention by observing and dealing with problems in an earlier timeframe. The time of no accountability is over.

**Published by**

Ministry for Youth  
and Families

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2511 VX The Hague  
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September 2007