Youth and Family Centres in The Netherlands
Introduction

Generally speaking, children and young people and their families in the Netherlands are doing well. Good basic facilities are available to stimulate the health and development of young people and to support parents in raising their children. And yet, within the Dutch system, more can be done to stimulate parenthood and the pedagogical quality of child care and education and to identify potential problems in a much earlier stage. Cooperation between organizations is not always optimal. And there is room for improvement of the services. These insights motivated the Dutch government to create Youth and Family Centres in all municipalities in the Netherlands.

Why Youth and Family Centres?
Local youth policy in the Netherlands is characterized by a disconnected range of parental support services and a lack of cohesion in youth health care. Only the baby well clinic is well-known, low-threshold and capable of reaching the majority of parents (100% in the first year of life until 80.6% in the fifth year of life). But it is debatable whether parents always receive adequate information and advice. Moreover, the facilities at the baby well clinics are intended for parents with children up to the age of four. Parents with older children have far more trouble finding the right support even though many of them experience child-raising as a heavy and difficult job. Various surveys have shown that parents do not know where to go for advice and the services do not always match the needs. In addition there are also problems when it comes to the pedagogical skills and services in education and welfare. These shortcomings have led to a steadily increasing use of specialized youth care.
If proper parental and youth support were universally available at a familiar location this might prevent premature referrals to specialists and address problems early, thus avoiding more intensive and expensive care at a later date. The Youth and Family Centres will hopefully fill this gap and strengthen primary support in cooperation with child care, education and welfare facilities. In this way they must evolve into the main support agency for families and provide parents and youth with direct assistance when required.

The decision to set up local centres is in line with the recommendation by the Council of Europe ‘to recognize the importance of parental responsibilities and the need to provide parents with sufficient enough support to help them fulfil their responsibilities’. The Council also makes a case for ‘local centres and services providing parents with information and assistance’ (Council of Europe, 2006)

Youth and Family Centre

- Combines local functions and tasks related to health, growing up and parenting
- Is an easily accessible walk-in location
- Can be found in every municipality/district under the same name
- Has a positive image aimed at facilitating parenthood and growing up
- Offers information, advice and basic assistance
- Stands for early prevention and identification of youth and families at risk
- Can arrange interventions and referral in cooperation with a wide variety of facilities ranging from health care and education, to welfare and social (youth) care
- Renders services for parents and youth from pregnancy up to 23 years
- Is equally accessible to all cultural groups
- Gives advice to professionals who work with parents and youth
- Uses shared registers and electronic child databases

Youth and Family Centres in 2011

A Youth and Family Centre (YFC) is a familiar, low-threshold meeting point in a community to which (prospective) parents and their children, and youth, can go to with questions related to parenting and growing-up. The centre offers advice, support and tailored help. In 2008 the first centres were created. By 2011 all 430 Dutch municipalities
should have at least one centre. In the larger cities there will be several. The centre does not necessarily have to be a new building or a new organization. The development of the Youth and Family Centres in the Netherlands is currently well under way, by October 2010 276 municipalities (64% of all municipalities) have a YFC that works according to the basic model.
Profile of a youth and family centre

Basic model
There is no national standard for YFCs. All centres are designed and set-up within the local context. However, there is a basic model that describes the services that should be provided in order to be allowed to use the title and logo of the Youth and Family Centre:
- Child and youth health care
  Baby well clinics and municipal health services
- Five functions that have been stipulated in the Social Support Act:
  - information and advice
  - minor pedagogical support
  - identification of problems
  - guidance to help
  - coordination of care, including social work, family coaching and parenting support
- Link to the provincial Youth Care Agency
- Link to the School Care and Advice Teams

Functions linked to the Youth and Family Centres
Besides the basic model, there are many functions that could be linked to the YFCs, tailored to local needs. They can, for example, include or work together with:
- Child day care, play groups and early childhood education
- School attendance officers
- Community schools
- Children and youth work and other welfare organizations
- Health services such as GP’s and midwives
- Employment offices
- Support organizations for debt relief
- Police and probation services
Legal measures

Legislation
The legislative basis of youth care is the Act on Youth Care, which was accepted on the 1st of January 2005. According to this act every municipality must have a YFC. There is legal supervision on all centres by various inspections. This Act was adapted at the end of 2009 in order to arrange that every municipality in the Netherlands makes use of a so called Reference Index for Youth at risk (Verwijsindex Risicojongeren - VIR). The VIR is a national electronic system that brings together risk signals of youth (up to 23 years), as reported by social workers. The VIR has four objectives, namely to prevent problems from escalating; to improve the exchange of information between the different professional systems; to facilitate an efficient collaboration between professionals as well as coordinated assistance; to improve the assistance for children, parents and families at risk. Because of the reporting in the VIR, social workers know if a child is seen by a colleague, so that they can confer on the best approach. Due to the VIR the focus stays on every child, social workers can inform each other, and all activities can be geared to one another.

Role of municipalities
Municipalities play a central role concerning the Youth and Family Centres. The realization of and the control on the Youth and Family Centres is their responsibility. Now that serious budget cuts are expected the municipalities face a big challenge when it comes to the further development and quality of the YFCs. Municipalities involve all parties related to the YFC - professionals, parents, educators, and youth - in the development of the centres. They have to link the development of the YFC with their wider ranging youth policy. And lately there is also more focus on cooperation with the ‘pedagogical civil society’, to stimulate the strengths and positive relations within the society as a whole. Municipalities also face the task to take care of clear cooperation agreements and guarantees that all cooperation partners participate with sufficient capacity and effort. Another role of the municipalities is the decision whether to implement a digital YCF or not, and what it should contain. The digital YFC should include reliable information, compiled from various
organizations, about healthy development. The goal is to make good quality information available in a simple way for every one, via the local website. Municipalities must have an actual YFC before they introduce a digital YFC.

Digital Youth and Family Centres

The internet is very easily accessible for many people. This is the reason to approach the target groups of the YFC through this digital medium. The digital YFC is intended for professionals, parents, and youth. An important advantage is that the digital YFC is always open, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The possibility of asking questions through a digital medium lowers the threshold for many people. When the consultant thinks that just answering the questions is not sufficient, he or she can invite the questioner for a chat session, which is still anonymous. If necessary, a personal consultation can take place in the actual YFC. At that time a relationship of trust has been established between the questioner and the consultant, since both parties have already had contact through the internet. In this way, the digital YFC and the actual YFC reinforce each other.

Financing the Youth and Family Centres

YFCs are financed by the former Ministry of Youth and Families, through the so-called Broad Purpose Grant Youth and Family Centres. It is a long-term grant that runs from 2008 to 2011. In the management agreement “Working together”, signed by the government and municipalities, is set down how local youth policy should be implemented. One of the agreements is that funds are made available for municipalities intended specifically for youth health care and support for parenting and child development. The budget available from 2008-2011 amounts to € 100 million. Most local and regional authorities felt the need of extra investment to realise the targets. The new government has stated that serious budget cuts will take place. So the further development or even maintaining the present YFCs will not be an easy task.
A few examples

**Trendsetter Amsterdam**

The idea to organize primary support for parents and young adults at neighbourhood level originated in Amsterdam, which started setting up Parent and Child Centres (PCCs) in each district around 2002. The baby well clinic was turned into a PCC in which midwives, ante- and post-natal and child welfare clinics, school health care teams, parental support advice centres and the district officials worked together to remove the barriers between the various services and to make support available for all parents and adolescents in the neighbourhood. Triple P (parenting programme) is implemented as a basis for improvement of the quality of parental services.

**CJG Nunspeet**

The YFC in Nunspeet, a municipality with 26,713 inhabitants (January 2009), is located in a multifunctional accommodation where some GPs are working. With five other municipalities, Nunspeet has made mutual agreements on the subjects of the creation of YFCs, social work and School Care and Advice Teams.

Generally speaking, young people in the Netherlands are not very familiar with a YFC. They will not visit one easily. That is why the street corner work in Nunspeet plays an important role. The workers approach young people on the spot and are therefore easily accessible. Street corner work is also a common partner in the School Care and Advice Teams. They know the young people and can work quickly. ‘By being proactive you prevent nuisance’, according to the Nunspeet YFC. The cooperation between street corner work, youth care and – when necessary – the local police is effective. In the preparation phase young people were involved and the youth council was involved in the design of the YFC.

**Gemeente Amsterdam**

**Ouder- en Kindcentrum**

When necessary the PCC coordinates the care on an individual or family level and maintains regular contact with relevant organizations in the locality. In Amsterdam people say that, for parents, the PCC is the spider in the web of information, care, early identification and referral.
The Hague is the third city in the Netherlands with regard to the population of almost 500,000 inhabitants. Its agglomeration has more than twice that amount, 1,017,937 inhabitants (January 2010). There are eight YFC’s which still have to service a lot of people. Some started as early as 2008, some recently opened. In each part of the city the YFC works according to the same vision and approach. The location and the final design are different and matches the needs, wishes and possibilities of the neighbourhood. In the neighbourhood Escamp for example there are various services available, such as pedagogical consultation for parents, carers and professionals; Saturday activities for children with special needs; parent meetings both for mothers and fathers; online discussion about parenting; Mothers Inform Mothers, a meeting programme as complementary service to the baby well clinic; libraries for toys and sport and play materials; father centre; father and mother centre.
For the early detection of child abuse the link and cooperation with a local YFC is very important. Figure 2 shows how child abuse is being detected and dealt with in the Netherlands and how a local YFC works together with the local Youth Care Agency, Care and Advice Teams and the “Safety House”-network.

At this moment the Youth Care Agency is the formal entrance into the child and youth care system, organized at provincial level. The new government has announced plans to change the system and abandon the level of provinces in the system. This has consequences for the YFCs and will make their role more central. Changes are foreseen after 2011.

**Youth Care Agencies**

All of the 12 Dutch provinces have a Youth Care Agency, which is the access point to the youth care system. Young people and their parents can approach a youth care agency on their own accord, if local agencies are unable to support them with their problems. The office will then decide whether assistance is indicated. To ensure easy access to the agency, there are also a number of field offices across each province. These field offices will be able to undertake some or all of the tasks of the main provincial agencies.

**School Care and Advice Teams**

Teachers have an important role to play in the development and education of their pupils. This asks for pedagogical qualities and positive relations and cooperation with parents.
School Care and Advice Teams aim at organizing assistance and help needed for students with psychosocial problems; to encourage their balanced development and prevent early school drop-out. The YFC should be an important partner in the School Care and Advice Teams. This close link enables to improve the match of needs and services and to reinforce each other.

“Safety House”
A” Safety House” is a network-organization that focuses on youth from 12 to 18 years who are at risk or already in trouble with the police and the law. Authorities such as the school attendance officer, local police, child protection services, the public prosecutor and rehabilitation organizations, work together in the Safety House-Network to prevent or attack youth criminality. This asks for mutual information and cooperation with the professionals who work at the YFC. Early prevention or effective action against youth criminality has to be done in cooperation with parents and family. The YFC can facilitate family and youth support.
Professionals

Responsibilities of professionals
Professionals in the YFCs are responsible for the following tasks:

- Provision of services, such as information, advice, support and help for parents, youth and families.
- Early detection of (potential) risks and problems resulting in proper support or help and - if necessary - guiding to specialized help.
- Organizing and coordination of wrap around care in multi-problem situations.
- Monitoring, screening and vaccinating.

Professionals from different disciplines are responsible for the implementation of these tasks.
For instance, youth health care physicians, youth nurses, doctor’s assistants, welfare workers, social scientists, and school social workers.

Competencies
The Netherlands Youth Institute (NJI) and Movisie (the Netherlands centre for social development) described, in cooperation with professional and branch associations, competencies that are specific for working in YFCs. These
Competencies are important for every professional working in a centre. A distinction has been made between competencies that are goal-related and competencies that are task-related to a YFC.

Goal-related competencies are divided into four clusters:
- Work on demand
- Work for client empowering
- Work for the social environment
- Work in collaboration

Besides these goal-related competencies, all YFC-professionals have their own professional competencies.

To perform the core tasks of the YFCs, every professional brings in his or her own skills. This input can be seen as complementary.

The professionals are the ones who have to make the YFC into a success. Therefore, they are responsible for their own professional development and for acquiring the required competencies. Employers and authorities at a local and national level are responsible for creating the conditions and functions needed so that professionals can do their work adequately and provide the services that are needed.

**Learning on the job**

One of the factors that lead to success is a learning on the job environment. In the municipalities that were examined by NJi and Movisie, training often contains specific elements of working in a YFC, but not according to an educational plan. Such a plan is relevant, because schooling is most effective when based on an analysis of the situation, on the learning goals of the professional, and on analysis of the desired learning efficiency. There is also more learning efficiency if the schooling participants (such as YFC-professionals, managers, and YFC-coordinators) are aware of their own schooling needs and know how to explicit them. For that reason, there should be an investment in the preparations prior to the learning project. Not only schooling is important, but other instruments, such as job shadowing, supervision and peer review, also contribute to better results.
International cooperation

The Netherlands Youth Institute (NJi) has organized annual international meetings about the YFC’s since 2008. Through international exchange of knowledge and experiences on theory and practice, NJi aims to contribute to the development of YFCs in the Netherlands. The first meeting in 2008 concentrated on similar developments of local parenting and child development support in England, Finland and Germany. In 2009, the focus was on English, Finnish, French and Canadian examples of involving parents and meeting their needs in YFCs and creating social support. The recent meeting, in September 2010, aimed at inspiring Dutch policy makers and professionals about leadership, multi-agency and integrated working as well as about parent empowerment. During this last meeting international examples from England, Flanders, Germany, Scotland and Sweden were presented.

Lessons learned

The key lessons learned from these expert meetings include:

- Managing family centres and realizing integrated working requires several competencies, such as connecting and integrating different disciplines as well as overcoming barriers and professional competition.
- Working in these centres requires certain competencies in dealing with parents, such as developing a vision on working with them, investing in meaningful relationships with them and recognizing them as experts and partners.
- The need to acknowledge that there may be a gap between the existing and required competencies of all staff members employed by these centres.
- Making family centres easily accessible requires creating plenty of space and opportunities for parents and their children to meet informally.
- The impact of these centres should be measured to underline what works and should be done to ensure the continuation of financial support from the national and local government.
The role of the Netherlands Youth Institute

The Netherlands Youth Institute supports municipalities in making the local youth care organizations work together more coherently, with the implementation of a YFC and with the development of an effective offer of active interventions, tailored to the local need for improvement of basic and specialised services for youth, parents and families.

School Care and Advice Teams
School Care and Advice Teams improve the assistance to students with psychosocial problems, encourage their balanced development and prevent early school drop-out. The Netherlands Youth Institute stimulates the structural cooperation between school, youth care, social work, police and compulsory education. The institute also initiates and supports the quality improvement of the School Care and Advice Teams and the link with the YFCs. The idea is that the teams and YFCs reinforce each other in the care for the child and its family.

Support to YFCs
The Netherlands institute supports the vision development of YFCs and takes care of the development and implementation of parent information, observation instruments and programmes for parental support. The institute also advises about the best care offer and the most efficient care coordination. It researches the matching of the basic task package of youth health care, the school and care structure and the provincial youth care, to form a complete cooperation chain. The institute also encourages cooperation with social work and GPs, and the offering of tailored help to families.
Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

After the elections of June 2010 a new government has been installed on 14 October 2010. Most responsibilities of the former Ministry for Youth and Families are transferred to the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Sport. The State Secretary is responsible for the integral youth programme, the integral youth supervision, the youth inspection, the secure institutions youth care for non-criminal youngsters, and the integration of referral and assessment.

After the system change and transfer of responsibilities, the YFCs already in operation will also serve as a front office for all municipal youth care.

http://english.minvws.nl/en/

Association of Netherlands Municipalities

The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (in Dutch: VNG) has a supporting role in the establishment and realization of the YFCs. As the principal representative of all Dutch municipalities, the VNG promotes and discusses the associations’ interests with the central government, parliament, the European institutions and other public organizations.

The VNG offers support to municipalities in different ways through sharing knowledge, implementation advice and various projects, such as a YFC supporting team that offers municipalities and regional institutions independent practical help with the design of a YFC.

www.vng.nl click on ‘English’ button.


**Netherlands Centre Youth health**

The Netherlands Centre Youth health (in Dutch: NCJ) started in October 2010 and is a legal continuation of the youth health department of RIVM (national institute for public health and the environment). Legal responsibility for the centre lies with GGD Nederland (Area Health Authority) and ActiZ (Dutch association of 415 care providers – among others in youth health care). The contribution of youth health in the YFC consists of the tracking of the development of children during their youth.

http://www.ncj.nl/

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**ZonMw, the Netherlands organization for health research and development**

Progress requires research and development. ZonMw funds health research and stimulates use of the knowledge developed to help improve health and health care. ZonMw's main commissioning organizations are the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research.

ZonMw, the knowledge centre of the Netherlands Youth Institute and the Netherlands Centre Youth Health work together in the ‘Knowledge programme Youth’ of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. The aim of the programme is to supply professionals in youth care with knowledge about guidelines, instruments and interventions. A new knowledge programme will start in 2012.

http://www.zonmw.nl/en/
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About the Netherlands Youth Institute

The Netherlands Youth Institute is the Dutch national institute for child and youth matters. Its main aim is an optimal development of children and young people by improving the quality and effectiveness of youth and parent services. As an expert centre, the Netherlands Youth Institute links scientific research to the practitioners’ need for knowledge. It supports professionals in the field of children and youth through advice on policy, programmes and implementation, and by training professionals in evidence based methods.

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