

Better Care Network Netherlands meeting on “Family Support and Strengthening”

May 6, 2013 at Wereldkinderen, The Hague

Also shared through email in addition to these meeting notes: PowerPoint presentations by Wereldkinderen, Give a Child a Family and ICS and a list of participants.

The meeting started with **introductions** by participants. All participants were asked to share their motto regarding skilful parenting. Some of the motto's: love should be translated into time, care, children need at least one parent that is crazy about them, love and communication, help the parents instead of institutionalising children, what you give attention to will increase, help parents, not repeat the mistakes we made in the Netherlands regarding foster care, end voluntourism.

We continue with the first presentation by Margot Klute from **Wereldkinderen**. She explains Wereldkinderen's strategy in which the child is at the centre of what they do. Through the *Together4Change Alliance* (with ICS, Wilde Ganzen, SOS Children's Villages) they focus on skilful parenting in child protection programmes in Ethiopia, Kenya and South Africa. *(Please see PPT presentation for more details).*

One of Wereldkinderen's partners in **South Africa** is **Give a Child a Family (GCF)**. Elize Coetzee, Director Resource Development, has joined us and gives a presentation about the organisation; it's development and activities, especially the foster care programme.

GCF works in Kwazulu Natal in South Africa, an area with a high percentage of crimes (against children) and with the highest HIV and AIDS prevalence in the world. The organisation was started as a short-term shelter for orphans and vulnerable children (and their mothers). In 2002 they started their foster care programme with a vision of secure families for children. This included the recruitment, screening and training of potential families. Placing their info on a database for all children in institutions in the area. A child could then be matched with a family who would best meet their needs. All families and children were seen monthly at support groups and an annual foster care forum. At that time it was clear that about 50% of the children still had families and GCF started a reunification programme to ensure that families have the capacity to care for their own children. Others were placed with family (kinship care) or non-related families.

The African model of foster care is usually long-term (and different from adoption). While investigation is being done about biological parents, children (0-12 years old) are placed in foster families, for a maximum of 2 years. If in that time no parents have been found or the situation of the families has not improved, the foster family becomes permanent. This prevents for example issues around care leaving. About 50% of all children are reunified with their parents/family.

From 2011, GCF started focussing more on prevention and early intervention. Elize then presents their new strategy – *Putting the pieces together* - in the shape of a circle in which the child is surrounded by various circles of protection. *(See slides for more details.)*

There are various activities in the programme like parenting skills workshops, grief and bereavement workshops, support groups, life and financial skills, food gardening, war rooms and support groups (that become informal child watch committees).

Results to date: 240 families. By the end of 2015 GCF aims to have reached 450 families and approximately 3.000 children.

Main challenges: Finding foster families for children with disabilities. Have not succeeded yet; Because of work (Public Works Programme)/jobs, it is often hard for parents to join trainings; It is generally believed that NGOs have a lot of money → many demands.

Elize's presentation is followed by a presentation by Maaïke Stolte from **ICS**, lead in the **Together4Change Alliance**. She explains more about the *skilful parenting approach*.

Parents often face many challenges like economic challenges, HIV/AIDS (changing parenting roles) and migration:

- Socio-economic programme: increased income not necessarily means an increased wellbeing of children → capacity building of families: how use this increased income for increased wellbeing of children;
- Preventive approach towards child protection. A lot of interest in skilful parenting from families at risk → prevent violation of child rights

6 basic skilful parenting modules: roles and responsibilities, self-esteem and affirmation, discipline and values, communication, family budgeting and child protection. (*See slide*).

These modules need to be translated to the local situation. A manual has been developed for South Africa together with Proud2Be. In Kenya and Tanzania people are for example more timid and the manual therefore needs to be adjusted.

They work with parent support groups (PSG) – for example through existing farmer's groups in Kenya. Starting point is always current practices. After CBOs have trained these support groups there are three representatives in the PSG who continue with parenting issues with support from CBO. (*See slide*).

Questions from participants

ICS → *Any disadvantages from working with existing groups? They already focus on agriculture. Does it fit?* Started with this approach in the beginning of 2012 and experiences are very positive. Parents mention they appreciate it, as they do not often have the possibility to talk about parenting issues. The idea of working with existing groups is to ensure sustainability.

GCF → *How do you make sure foster families are not just taking children for the grant they will receive?* This is not easy. People can fool you, but the process of screening is very intensive. One person in the family must have secure income; we get feedback from neighbours, school, and the chief. We ask for police clearances, a health check. After placement of a child there are "post placement support groups". Participation will also show how committed families are. A risk remains, but we put things in place to minimize risk. We turn away 30% of the families after screening. The screening process takes at least 8 weeks and includes 7 family visits. After placement there are three types of monitoring: Statutory: 3, 6 and 12 months by social workers; Non-statutory with a minimum of 2 every month; Voluntary support groups.

ICS/GCF: What are the main issues that surface in support groups? Many older women take care of children: behaviour management of children; child protection issues and economic issues.

ICS/GCF: Many stakeholders are involved. Are you able to get everyone involved? Any campaigning to increase the scale? For example, National Child Protection weeks are organised; regional campaigns around foster parenting. Then there is PAN – the Parenting Africa Network – of which 60 organisations are part. Have started country chapters. They aim to bring parenting issues as prevention for families at risk on political agenda's.

Proud2Be: Do they work together with schools? Not yet.

ICS: Do you work with local people (facilitators, trainers): yes – *see slide CBOs*

GCF: Do you work with volunteers? GCF still does student placements, however, not for routine day-to-day practice. Students work along side social workers for practical experience.