

## **Better Care Network Netherlands**

### ***Mandate and organisational structure***

19 September 2007 (based on Dutch draft of 19- 09-07)

## **Background**

According to a UNICEF publication, in 2003<sup>1</sup> more than 143 million children had lost one or both parents. In addition, a great number of children do not live with their parents due to poverty, lack of access to basic services, abuse, and exploitation.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that *'in order to be able to develop his or her personality fully and harmoniously, a child should grow up in a family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding'*. In line with the CRC, alternative forms of care which are family-based are preferable when children must be removed from home.

In a large number of countries, there are insufficient structures to ensure that the best interest of the child is upheld. Oftentimes residential care is chosen because other alternatives are limited. A greater investment in providing parents with adequate support (including financial support in certain circumstances) in exercising their responsibility as primary care givers would prevent many households from placing their children elsewhere. Informal forms of care (within the family or in the community) should be recognised by the state and where possible supported. Likewise, foster families can fulfil an important role, but they generally receive insufficient support and are poorly monitored. In order to ensure the safety, well-being and healthy development of children without adequate parental care, it is essential for national and international actors to establish and enforce legal standards. In doing so, it is necessary to focus on finding a lasting solution which is tailored to the specific situation of the child concerned.

## **Better Care Network**

The aim of the network is to improve care for children without adequate parental care through joint cooperation and collaboration. BCN aims to share good practices and methodologies across countries and regions .

In 2003, UNICEF, Save the Children UK, CARE, the Africa Bureau of USAID and the Displaced Children's and Orphans Fund came together in recognition of the urgent need for concerted action. In 2005, the Better Care Network was established, with the secretariat based out of UNICEF in New York. Since that time, the BCN list serve has grown to include over 1100 participants who actively share information globally. Knowledge and exchange of information is central to the network. A comprehensive website singularly devoted to information dissemination around better care now houses over 400 documents and tools, and receives over 30,000 hits per month. In addition, there are working groups on advocacy and research which share expertise, form opinions and promote wider awareness on specific subjects. Recently, the Steering Committee has expanded to include the Firelight Foundation, and the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

## **Better Care Network Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, a large number of organisations have for many years been involved in care for children without adequate parental care. In order to bring the knowledge and experience of these organisations together and to promote exchange, a number of organisations (initially Kinderpostzegels, Cordaid, IFCO, STOP AIDS NOW and later a number of other organisations) have

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<sup>1</sup> The State of the World's Children 2006, Excluded and Invisible, UNICEF, 2005, p. 49

established, with the full support of the Global Better Care Network secretariat, a Dutch chapter of the Better Care Network.

The Dutch chapter has an open structure similar to that of the international network, with a website for the purpose of exchanging information on research and good practice, and meetings on specific subjects, which are open to all.

The Dutch network is the first country-based BCN initiative. There will be a link to the website of the Better Care Network Netherlands on the international Better Care website and from the Dutch site, there will be links to websites to the Better Care working groups and the websites of its members. Preparations are underway for the establishment of a European network, and it is anticipated that the learning and experience of setting up the Dutch chapter will help guide the further establishment of national movements.

## **Mission Statement**

The work of the Better Care Network is guided by the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and the *Stockholm Declaration on Children and Residential Care* (2003). The Dutch chapter of the Better Care Network is a network of organisations and individuals that are actively involved with children without adequate parental care. The network is committed to promoting *Better Care* for children without adequate parental care in the Netherlands and worldwide. *Better Care* means

- A reduction in the number of children separated from or abandoned by their parents;
- Children outside family care and/or runaway children are reunited with their families, wherever possible and appropriate;
- Increasing, strengthening and supporting family and community based care options for children who cannot be cared for by their parents;
- Ensuring for children in contact with juvenile justice and protection systems that appropriate legislation, procedures, authorities and agencies are available and functioning, as stipulated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Establishing international and national standards for all forms of care for children without adequate parental care and establishing structures to monitor their implementation;
- Ensuring that residential institutions are used in a very limited manner and only when appropriate.

The Better Care Network facilitates active information exchange and collaboration on these issues. In addition, at international, regional and national level, the Network advocates for universally valid quality criteria.

## **Goal and activities of BCN Netherlands**

The BCN Netherlands goals are:

- Facilitate active dissemination in the Netherlands of relevant information from organisations connected with the international BCN (e.g. through translation into Dutch, an accessible website and organising meetings on relevant topics);
- Make relevant information originating from Dutch organisations (and their partners) available to the international BCN (e.g. through translation of relevant information into English and by ensuring that organisations in The Netherlands and their partners connect with the network);
- Raise awareness in the Netherlands in relation to the different elements of *Better Care* for children without parental care
- Coordinate policy, advocacy and practice among relevant organisations in The Netherlands.

In order to achieve the above, the following activities will be undertaken:

- Construct and maintain a website for the promotion of active information exchange and debate.

- Establish relevant time-bound working groups. Anticipated areas for working group cooperation are advocacy and research/joint learning.
- Organise at least one meeting per year to explore a specific topic and awareness raising

The *mission statement* guides the joint activities, such as the content of the website, choice of topics for meetings and the establishment of new working groups (see below).

The Dutch network will not adopt any formal standpoints. However, it is open to organisations collaborating in a working group to adopt a standpoint and to indicate in doing so that their collaboration takes place within the framework of the Better Care Network.

## **The network**

The Better Care Network Netherlands is an open and independent network. Organisations and individuals who support the mission statement may join the network.

Membership of the network does not mean automatic approval of the work of the organisation of the organisation concerned. It is not a quality brand.

## **Core group, members, coordinator and working groups**

The network is guided by the *Core Group*. The core group comprises representatives of organisations involved in the founding of the network or invited by the founding organisations to participate. They contribute to the initiative financially pro rata and ensure its quality. They also give active support to the BCN international coordinator. The main tasks of the Core Group are:

- Annually determining policy priorities for the Better Care Network Netherlands;
- Approving the plans of the secretariat – these are drawn up by the coordinator - and monitoring their progress;
- Determining the agenda for general network meetings;
- Taking the initiative in stimulating the working groups;
- Ensuring financial support for the secretariat and the activities of the network
- Liaising with the International Better Care Network.

*Coordination* is delegated to one of the participating organisations which can, if necessary, receive financial support from the other organisations.

*Working groups* in which a number of members participate, can be established on relevant topics. The aim is to share expertise and arrive at common standpoints. These are then used to convey recent insights in relation to the topic concerned, to lobby in the Netherlands, the EU and at international level and/or to organize campaigns in relation to the Dutch public. Each working group develops a plan of action. It combines the strengths (funds, knowledge, contacts) of the participating organisations in order to achieve a shared goal.

## **Participating organisations**

A list of participating organisations is available on the website

## **Contact**

More information is available on the website of the Better Care Network Netherlands:

[www.bettercarenetwork.nl](http://www.bettercarenetwork.nl)