

Campaigns and awareness-raising as the key to combating volunteering and internships in orphanages

Position paper by Better Care Network Netherlands (BCNN) for the round table on March 27 2019 on the 'white paper' initiative no. 35069 by member of parliament Van Haga: 'A good intention is not always a good idea: a proposal to combat orphanage tourism' ('Een goede bedoeling is niet altijd een goed idee: een voorstel tot bestrijding van weeshuistoerisme')

The words of Sushil Babu Chhetr, who grew up in an orphanage in Nepal, capture the essence of the problem of orphanage tourism and its possible solutions:

"I grew up in two very different orphanages – one was corrupt and exploitative, the other was trying its best to care for the children. But in the context of Nepal, even the concept of an orphanage makes no sense – they shouldn't have to exist at all. Families here are big and live close together. We also live in mutually-supportive communities, where neighbours help out neighbours. Why, then, can't we support a kid in need? Why should it be some white person's responsibility to take care of them? If we really want to stop kids from being trafficked there are two things that we need to do – the first one is to make the parents aware of the situation, so they can make an informed choice. The second one is to raise awareness amongst the volunteers and donors. Basically it is the volunteers who are creating the demand. The volunteers want to play with kids so the traffickers will bring kids to them. If there were no volunteers, no money coming in, no donations, there would be no demand and the traffickers would not go to all that effort to collect children. The NGOs need to coordinate a real campaign for the people, maybe using celebrities and TV."¹

Doing volunteer work and internships in orphanages is very popular: a combination of 'doing good' for children, getting to know other cultures, and travel to faraway places.² Together with a large number of other organizations in the Netherlands and around the world, BCNN campaigns to end volunteering and internships in orphanages – commonly known as 'orphanage tourism'. Better Care Network Netherlands strongly supports the analysis and solutions presented in the initiative paper by Mr Van Haga.

We particularly highlight proposals four and six in the initiative:

- 4. Launch a public awareness campaign to warn (prospective) volunteers about the risks of orphanage tourism.
- 6. Take more active steps to warn travellers abroad about the risks.

BCNN supports proposal four which addresses the importance of raising awareness about the damage and dangers of orphanage tourism, and the need to stimulate debate about responsible alternative forms of volunteering. We recommend that internships in orphanages be included in the awareness process and debate. Internships in orphanages can have similar negative consequences as? volunteering in orphanages.

The Netherlands has an obligation to give serious attention to this problem as a signatory to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse ('Lanzarote Convention'). Article 5 of the Convention requires states to promote awareness of the rights and protection of children and makes specific reference to contact with children as part of cultural and leisure activities. These activities include volunteering and volunteer services.

In the last one and a half years, BCNN has run two campaigns aimed at young people: Stop Orphanage Tourism ('Stopweeshuistoerisme') and Stop Orphanage Internships ('Stopweeshuisstages')³. Internationally,

¹ <http://learning-service.info/i-was-the-child-you-played-with-a-life-on-the-streets-and-in-an-orphanage-part-three/>

² [Report of an inquiry on orphanage tourism \(Rapport enquête weeshuistoerisme\) \(2017\), Better Care Network Netherlands](#)

³ www.stopweeshuistoerisme.nl

the campaign 'The Love You Give'⁴ has been launched by Better Care with support from partner organizations working through a coalition called ReThink Orphanages.⁵ The worldwide movement against orphanage tourism has resulted in, among other things, several large providers of volunteer work, such as World Challenge and Projects Abroad, taking the decision to no longer offer placements in orphanages. Colleges and universities, including two in the Netherlands (Fontys Hogeschool Pedagogiek and the Institute of Social Studies), have signed a pledge to no longer allow internships in orphanages. It is clear that applying pressure through campaigns helps to stop volunteer/internship providers from engaging in orphanage tourism.

In addition, we also emphasize the important role that the Dutch government can play in the travel advice it makes available and the information it distributes through its embassies about the dangers of orphanage tourism, as described in proposal six. This applies both to volunteer work and internships and also to visits to orphanages. This measure represents a small investment that could have a significant impact on travelers who are thinking of visiting or volunteering in orphanages.

In any implementation of the proposals from the initiative paper, BCNN stands ready to contribute its experience and networks.

OUR STANDPOINT

Orphanage tourism is harmful to children. Although it often begins with good intentions, volunteers and interns in orphanages may end up contributing to a 'business model' ('verdienmodel'), where money is earned from so-called orphans. This can lead to separation of families, child trafficking and the exploitation of children. Even in so-called 'good' institutions, a constant stream of mostly unqualified and inexperienced volunteers can lead to the aggravation of attachment problems or to children missing out on education and other basic rights. Orphanage tourism can turn children into tourist attractions.

Orphanage tourism perpetuates a form of institutional care that is harmful to children. Across the world, major reforms are currently underway to transform care from institutional to family- and community-based approaches. Great strides have been made in countries which in the past have had significant numbers of orphanages, for example Haiti, Cambodia and Kenya. Large-scale institutional care is being replaced by care in families, foster homes and other family-based settings. The Netherlands should show its full support for such transitions in its foreign policy.

By adopting the seven excellent policy proposals in the initiative paper put forward by Mr. Van Haga, the Dutch government can make an important contribution in the fight against orphanage tourism. The Netherlands could become a forerunner within the EU by actively intervening to protect children without parental care at various levels and thereby set an example for other EU countries to follow.

ABOUT BETTER CARE NETWORK NETHERLANDS

Better Care Network Netherlands is committed to improving the situation of children without parental care by fostering collaboration between organizations. We do this by sharing experiences, lessons learned and best practices gained from different countries and regions, and exploring their potential application elsewhere in other countries and regions. The network is led by a coalition of organizations consisting of: Defence for Children - ECPAT (chair), ICCO/KerkinActie, Stichting Kinderperspectief, SOS Children's Villages, UNICEF Netherlands, Wereldkinderen, ICS and Wilde Ganzen.

⁴ www.the-love-you-give.org

⁵ www.rethinkorphanages.org