

Parent networks

Migrant parents are definitely prepared to enlarge chances for their children to a better future. They experience ever so often their efforts to fail. Attention and support for their efforts is more than necessary. There is a strong need for extra information about children's development and education. Specially about subjects that parents question and doubt. Also there is a strong need for exchanging experiences with other parents and with professionals.

To make a start with giving extra support to migrant parents it is necessary to create a situation where parents feel accepted and safe, so that they can bring their worries and problems about everyday life out in the open.

Setting up a Parents Network on a local level is a way to organize activities in the neighbourhood, that give parents (i.c. mothers) the opportunity to live their cultural identity in a situation that is familiar with the cultural backgrounds. Such a parents network can be a location that focuses on information, schooling and support of mothers. So this location has a triple function. Activities developed have no intention to discuss or reject the traditional style of education, but will develop, enlarge and strengthen involvement and skills of parents and optimize the home-school relation.

This approach starts from the mothers perspective. The activities meet the needs that are formulated by the mothers themselves. Self-confidence and already acquired knowledge and skills will be emphasized and enlarged. The acting of mothers will be strengthened by reflection, relevant information and schooling, so that their supporting behavior in the family but also in the school improves.

So the Parents Network aims at stimulating societal participation considering the cultural background and making educational problems discussable and solvable.

Organizing and educating parents at a neighbourhood level prepares parents for participating in a familiar and safe context first, before inviting them to the school context.

This approach of Parents

Networks is based on the "Ouderpunt" (Parents Point) method.

- This method presumes every neighbourhood has its own 'key figures'. A key figure meets the following description: she has a certain level of development, engagement and familiarity with Western society. Key mothers are an accepted example for the neighbourhood.
- Every key mother knows at least one other mother who trusts her. The group of key mothers creates the 'first circle'. Other mothers, local institutions and school are in the 'second circle'.
- The mothers see themselves as a group with common shared interests: exchanging experiences, advising, supporting and accompanying each other in education of the children, school contacts, social workers and institutions.
- The organization of this common interest takes place in activities around and by the Parents Network. It is necessary to put together a strong group of key mothers from the neighbourhood to be the 'car pullers' of this project.
- This key group is coached by a professional and organizes sessions and all kinds of activities for and with mothers, sometimes together with an institute of education.
- The key group can mediate between parents and institutions.
- Parents help other parents best, because of the direct contact and understanding.

- School and other local institutions can ask the cooperation of the Parents Network to set up a project together, or to contact parents that are difficult to approach.

Examples of good practice with Parents

Networks On three locations in Rotterdam (Pendrecht, Zuidwijk and Beverwaard districts) Parents Networks are established and have succeeded in realizing good cooperation between organizations of different ethnical backgrounds, schools, social work, wellness organizations, inhabitants and the local department.

Recommendations

School are of course the first responsible to inform parents about the ins and outs of the school system, the home – school communication and parents participation. But this can only be successful if necessary conditions are taken into consideration:

The school must develop a clear vision on parents participation and on how to inform and coach them.

Parents must be taken serious, must be involved in getting the problems clear and invited to formulate their help questions. School should not stop after one project, but keep organizing continuing activities.