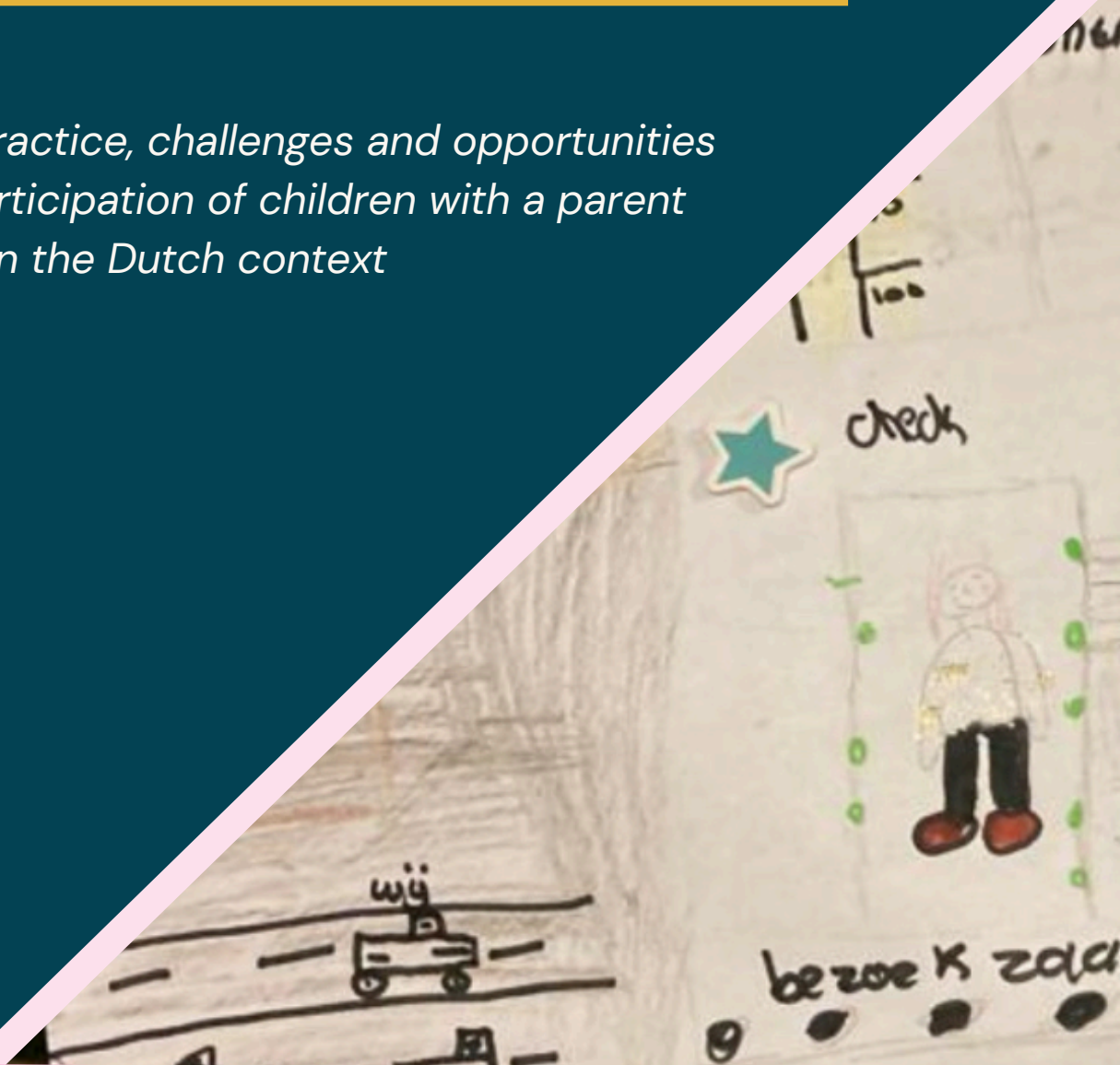


OUR VOICE MATTERS!

Current practice, challenges and opportunities for the participation of children with a parent in prison in the Dutch context



Two poems jointly written by members of the Youth Club ages 6, 9, and 13 of the Our Stories Matter project (original Dutch and English translation)

*Wij roepen met klem
geef ons een stem!*

*We strongly urge
give us a voice!*

*Wij zijn nog klein
maar onze stem mag er zijn!*

*We may still be small
but our voice matters!*

*De grote mensen beslissen dit en dat
wij willen graag zelf zeggen hoe en wat*

*Grown-ups decide this and that
but we would like to say for ourselves how and what*

*Alle regels zijn gebeiteld in graniet
maar uitleg daarover krijgen we niet*

*All rules are carved in stone
yet no one explains them to us*

*Het bezoek zou leuk moeten zijn
maar nu is het spannend en niet fijn*

*Visits should be fun
but now they are tense and not nice*

*Ik ben een kind en ik ben klein
naar de gevangenis gaan vind ik niet fijn
hoge muren, gesloten deuren,
poortjes, kluisjes en andere geuren*

*I am a child and I am small
visiting prison is not fun at all
high walls, locked doors,
gates, lockers and other smells*

*Er zijn heel veel mensen!
streng en lief, dikke en dunne
blank en bruin, kort en lang
al die indrukken maken me bang*

*There are so many people!
strict and kind, big and small,
white and brown, short and tall
all these impressions make me scared*

*Zo'n plek met veel regels en wetten
maar wie is daar om op mij te letten?*

*Such a place with many rules and laws
but who is there to look after me?*

*Ik wil graag dat er iemand op mij wacht
mij begroet en naar mij lacht
iemand die mij vertelt wat er gaat gebeuren
en mij de weg wijst door alle gangen en deuren*

*I would like someone to wait for me
greet me and smile at me
someone who tells me what is going to happen
and shows me the way through all the halls and doors*

*Als dat gebeurt ben ik niet minder klein
maar het maakt mijn bezoek wel fijn!*

*If that happens I am not any less small
but it does make my visit a lot nicer!*

INTRODUCTION

Following Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)¹, every child has the right to participate in decision-making processes on matters affecting the child. This right to child participation is identified as the first thematic area of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child² and is included in Council of Europe Recommendation CM/REC(2018)5 concerning children with imprisoned parents³. However, achieving meaningful child participation within the justice sector still proves challenging for many EU countries, including the Netherlands. Especially within correctional facilities (CFs), where an unequal power relationship underlies the entire system, child participation is not a given. Nevertheless, child participation within the prison system is very important to ensure the well-being and interests of children with a parent in prison and to support the bond between detained parents and their child(ren).

ARTICLE 12 UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

The EU and Janivo Stichting-funded Our Stories Matter project by the Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC), Exodus Nederland and Expertisecentrum K I N D (with support from Zaanstad Prison, the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (*Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen* or DJI), Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) and the European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services (EuroPris)) aims to support the implementation of child participation in the Dutch prison context.

1. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Available online: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

2. EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee (2021). Available online: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en#thematic-areas-of-the-strategy

3. Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning children with imprisoned parents (2019). Available online: <https://edoc.coe.int/en/children-s-rights/7802-recommendation-cmrec20185-of-the-committee-of-ministers-to-member-states-concerning-children-with-imprisoned-parents.html>

The project aims to structurally embed meaningful, inclusive and safe children's participation in policy design and implementation processes at local and national level in prisons in the Netherlands, and to a lesser extend in the whole EU. In doing so, it focuses on different target groups: (1) children with a parent in prison, (2) prison management and staff and policy makers, and (3) civil society organisations working in the field of child-friendliness and -participation related to detention. The project has the following objectives:

1. Increase understanding of the opportunities, barriers and drivers of child participation in the Dutch prison system by mapping and presenting them.
2. Create more actual space for child participation through two pilots: one focussing on the opportunities for child participation in Zaanstad Prison and one focussing on improvement of existing programmes for participation of children.
3. Establish a culture within the prison service (in the Netherlands and on EU level (to a somewhat lesser extend)) in which participation of children is a self-evident part of policy design and implementation.

To achieve objective 1, the project group collected data using various methods to identify the opportunities, barriers and drivers of child participation in the Dutch prison system. This report summarises the main findings and the resulting recommendations with the aim of raising awareness among the various target groups. Furthermore, the results in this report will be used to support the development of the pilots under objective 2.

To ensure children's right to participation within the *Our Stories Matter* project as well, the project is advised by a Youth Club. The Youth Club consists of five children aged between 6 and 19 with a parent in prison. Under the guidance of a coach with lived experience, the Youth Club advises the project group on the development and implementation of project activities and has the opportunity to contribute to publications and public events of the project. As such, the Youth Club has been involved in the writing process of this report, including the formulation of the recommendations presented. The Soundboard Group of Expertisecentrum K I N D was also consulted, which consists of (young) adults with a (formerly) detained parent. Many of them have experienced the detention of a parent in their own youth, so they can be considered experiential experts.⁴

4. For more information on the Soundboard Group, see <https://expertisecentrumkind.nl/2022/04/14/klankbordgroep-expertisecentrum-k-i-n-d/> (only available in Dutch)



WHAT IS *CHILD PARTICIPATION*?

This report follows the definition of child participation from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which describes this concept as *"a process [which includes] information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes"*.⁵ In addition, the so-called Lundy model (2007) is used to conceptualise the right to child participation as enshrined in Article 12 of the UNCRC. The Lundy model states that meaningful and effective child participation has four separate but related and chronological elements⁶:

1. **Space** – Children should be provided with safe and inclusive opportunities to form and express their views
2. **Voice** – Children should be facilitated to express their views
3. **Audience** – The views put forward by children must be listened to by a designated and identifiable person or body charged with this task
4. **Influence** – Children's views should be considered with due weight and acted upon as appropriate in decision-making processes in accordance with their age and capacity. To ensure this, children and young people should be told what decision was made, how their views were regarded and why action has proceeded in a certain way.

Additionally, the project group has added the element '**Intent**' to the model. This means that any child participation initiative must have a specific intention (carried by both the relevant authorities and the implementing organisation). These parties must be able to articulate the rationale and added value of child participation within their mission.

5. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009). General Comment No. 12: The right of the child to be heard. Available online: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/crc/2009/en/70207>

6. Lundy, L. (2007). Voice is not enough: conceptualizing Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 927–942.

DATA COLLECTION

During the data collection phase, a rich array of information was gathered through three data streams. First, desk research was conducted to study current policy development and implementation processes and to identify existing initiatives. The desk research formed the basis for the second data stream, consisting of semi-structured in-depth interviews.

For the interviews, all relevant experts and professionals working at CFs or DJI, in civil society and in the academic sectors identified during the desk research were approached. A total of 29 respondents (22 women and 7 men) were interviewed (see table), including two respondents who in their youth experienced having a parent in prison and are now working in this field themselves. They can therefore be considered both as an expert by experience and as a professional.

OVERVIEW RESPONDENTS

Restorative counsellors and family- and mother-child officers working in CFs	6
Professionals working at management level within CFs or at DJI	2
Professionals and volunteers active in civil society	17
Academic researchers affiliated with a Dutch research university or university of applied sciences	2
Other	2
Total	29

Finally, several child-friendly methods were used to collect data among children with a parent in prison. In Zaanstad Prison, Dreamboard activities were held with 11 children (7 boys and 4 girls), during which participants were asked to make drawings under the guidance of an art coach based on the question *'If you were the director of this place for a day, what would you change to make it more fun for children?'* Additionally, during the Exodus Autumn and Spring camps, children were given the 'My Story' diary, based on best practices from Scotland. The diary allowed children to share their opinions and experiences on various questions, including the Dreamboard activity question, through writing and drawings. The diaries were completed by 13 children, six boys aged 9 to 17 and seven girls aged 10 to 14. To support the Dreamboard and My Story activities, the Soundboard Group of Expertisecentrum K I N D was also consulted.⁷ Finally, the results of an online survey by COPE among children with a parent in prison regarding the Netherlands were also included in the data collection. This survey aimed to identify how to make prison spaces better, friendlier and more welcoming for children.⁸ Six Dutch children participated in this survey (1 boy and 5 girls).

7. For more information on these activities, see: <https://expertisecentrumkind.nl/2024/12/04/kindparticipatie-our-stories-matter/> (only available in Dutch)

8. See also the report on this survey by COPE: <https://childrenofprisoners.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Online-Survey-Report.pdf>

CHILD PARTICIPATION IN THE DUTCH PRISON SYSTEM

In the Netherlands, there is increasing attention to the importance of a good parent-child relationship and child-friendliness within the prison system. Consequently, a number of important steps have been taken in recent years to safeguard the interests of children. For instance, DJI is actively collaborating with civil society organisations and academia on initiatives to improve parent-child contact and child-friendliness in prisons, including a number of programmes at national level such as the Parents, Children and Detention Programme (*Ouders, Kinderen en Detentieprogramma* or OKD) in collaboration with Exodus⁹ and the Family Approach with Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen.¹⁰ The theme is also of interest to civil society and the academic sector, with various organisations and initiatives working on organising and supporting information and activities around parent-child contact, training and contact supervision programmes, and knowledge gathering, development and dissemination, among others. An overview of all organisations and initiatives that focus on children with a parent in prison identified is included in Annex I.

Despite positive developments in the area of parent-child relationships in detention and child-friendliness in prisons, there still seems to be great variation in the awareness and application of child participation. Currently, child participation is not a defined part of the policy of DJI or in the correctional facilities, and the opinions and experiences of children with a parent in prison are almost never asked in a structural and/or systematic way by CFs. Activities aimed at parent-child contact and overall child-friendliness within the CF are mainly given shape on the basis of observations and the staff's own ideas and initiatives. Additionally, feedback from children is sometimes gathered through short informal conversations or forms of small talk. Within the CF, this initiative usually comes from the restorative counsellor, the family officer and/or the mother-child officer, however, there are only a small number of these in the Netherlands (7 restorative counsellors¹¹, 3 family officers and one mother-child officer in total across the 26 correctional facilities in the country). This is usually done on their own initiative and mostly informally, meaning the opportunity for participation and degree of participation is highly dependent on the specific CF, or even a specific staff member.

Within civil society and the academic sector, the level of children's participation within organisations and initiatives seems to vary widely, despite a broad recognition of the importance of children's voices. Nevertheless, there are several organisations and initiatives that actively engage with child participation. For example, a number of organisations explicitly mention child participation in their methodology, although at the moment it is not always systematically applied in their work. Other organisations/initiatives actively implement forms of child participation varying between one-off activities, applications linked to a specific project and more systematic applications. Virtually no initiatives appeared to take place on a national scale in all CFs.

9. The OKD programme requires all CFs in the Netherlands to set up special child-friendly visiting rooms and organise a half-day session outside regular visiting hours at least four times a year during which children can spend time with their detained parent. For more information on the OKD programme, see: <https://exodus.nl/diensten/ouders-kinderen-detentieprogramma> (only available in Dutch)

10. The Family Approach is an approach developed by Hanze University Groningen in cooperation with DJI aimed at strengthening family relationships of detainees and alleviating the problems of children with a parent in prison. This approach was initially implemented as a pilot, but has since become a regular part of the offer within DJI. For more information on the Family Approach, see: <https://www.gezinsbenadering.nl/> (only available in Dutch)

11. In the Dutch justice system, a *herstelconsulent* (restorative counsellor) is a neutral professional working within the prison system who facilitates restorative justice processes between incarcerated individuals and those harmed by their actions, such as victims or affected family members.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

To understand why child participation is rarely applied systematically within the prison system and to develop appropriate recommendations, it is important to identify the relevant challenges and barriers. Several challenges emerged from the data, which can be divided into three categories: (1) children with a parent in prison as a challenging target group, (2) impeding practical factors for implementation and (3) the penitentiary system as a complex context.

Children with a parent in prison as a challenging target group

There was a perception among the experts and professionals consulted that children with a parent in prison are a particularly complicated target group to approach for participation initiatives. Several factors play a role here, including the high level of distrust among children towards the prison system, low motivation for participation due to the gravity of the issue and the fact that not all children are aware of their parent's detention. Experience shows that it is difficult to build trust among children with a parent in prison, especially for employees of the CF, government agencies or others associated with the system that keeps the parent in detention. Often, children have many negative associations and experiences with the government and CFs, so they do not feel safe to speak out in that environment. As a result, children are less willing to participate in participation initiatives and their parents are also reluctant to motivate their children to participate.

However, while the consulted children with a parent in prison and experiential experts stated this perspective was recognisable, they stressed the importance of keeping a nuanced view of this group. For example, for some children, distrust towards the prison system may actually be a motivation to participate in participation activities. On the other hand, they also stressed that the presence of a supportive safety net and relatively good home situation is an especially important factor for joining participation activities, as these can demand a lot of energy from children with a parent in prison.

Additionally, the age differences within the target group and offering an accessible form of meaningful participation to young children under 12 are considered difficult. While this is always a challenging part of child participation, the sensitivity of the topic makes this especially complicated in the penitentiary context. Engaging in direct discussion with this group is often considered not child-friendly, and in some cases even unsafe for the child. There is also the question of what exactly can be expected from this young group in terms of the reflection and feedback they can offer. Especially in the case of more formal forms of participation, there existed doubt whether and how this can be offered to a younger target group in a child-friendly and meaningful way. Moreover, there are many children within this age group who are not aware that their father or mother is in prison. In these cases, children are often told that the incarcerated parent is either travelling, working abroad or working in prison. For this reason, it is difficult to involve these children in activities where the prison context is explicitly emphasised.

In some instances, professionals and experts also highlighted an experienced tension between the best interests of the child and their engagement in participation activities. The detention of a parent demands a lot of mental space and time from a child, so participation in such initiatives can be an additional burden. This creates an ethical dilemma as to whether the added value of child participation outweighs the space and energy participation requires from a child, especially in cases where children are already traumatised and regularly interact with different social services. As a result, professionals are sometimes reluctant to actively push for child participation, especially for more formal and large-scale activities.

Impeding practical factors for implementation

The data revealed a number of practical barriers that make it difficult in practice to implement initiatives aimed at child participation. The main limiting factor is the limited financial resources and/or logistical capacity available within CFs and CSOs to implement child-friendly initiatives, including child participation. When limited financial resources are available, child-focused initiatives are often the first to be cut, despite an awareness that working on the bond between detainees and their children is a protective factor for both. In other cases, the limiting factor is not funding, but shortages of the manpower needed to organise and implement an activity. Many CFs in the Netherlands are currently dealing with general understaffing. As a result, sometimes there are too few staff members available to support activities or priority is given to security over activities focused on parent-child contact. Furthermore, there are only 7 restorative counsellors, 3 family officers and one mother-child officer throughout the country, despite there being a total of 26 correctional facilities. Moreover, there is not always a full FTE available for them to fulfil this role within their CF, leading to this being a part-time responsibility alongside another function. In turn, civil society organisations often rely heavily on volunteers and are therefore limited in their capacity to provide facilitators for activities and mitigate shortages in the CFs. As a result, sufficient resources are not always available to provide the necessary attention, time, energy and guidance for child-friendly activities, including participation initiatives.

In addition, data indicated that these children as a group are difficult to approach in practice. For many actors in this field, direct interaction with the child is not possible without the intervention of one of the parents or guardians, making them heavily dependent on them. CFs work primarily with the detained parent, but those are often reluctant to involve their children in activities from the CF, for example out of fear that institutions such as child welfare services will immediately come into play if a child becomes involved. Moreover, privacy laws do not always allow CF staff to contact a detainee's family. This often creates a sense of distance between the CF and the child. Although civil society organisations are often closer to the families of detainees, they too are often heavily dependent on the caregiving parent or caregiver for contact with children.

Finally, many professionals indicated they find it difficult to find the right space to engage directly with children with a parent in prison. They often only come into direct contact with these children when they visit the detained parent, but feel very burdened to ask for time from a child on these occasions because there are so few opportunities for visitations. Using this time to engage with children for participation activities is seen as a gross violation of the visiting time and inconsistent with the purpose of visitations. Professionals who come into contact with children with a parent in prison outside the contact moments also reported that it is difficult to find the right place and/or the right moment to engage in conversation with them. They regularly experience a tension between creating a safe space for a child through the presence of a parent, versus the possibility that a child may not feel free to speak out because of their presence. Children with a parent in prison are often still very loyal to their parents, so they try to protect their parent by showing as little as possible that they are struggling.

The penitentiary system as a complex context

A final theme that emerged from the data is the specific context of the penitentiary system as a complex environment to realise child participation in a systematic and uniform way. It appears that a strong punitive culture still prevails within many CFs, resulting in regular tensions between security and the retributive function of CFs versus child-friendliness and its restorative function. Despite the important steps already taken with regard to parent-child contact and child-friendliness, there is still great variety in how much priority the management of different CFs give to this topic. Restorative counsellors and family and mother-child officers furthermore do not always feel other CF staff is supportive of initiatives such as the Family Approach. Among their colleagues, there is still often an emphasis on the punitive function of the CF and keeping the world inside the prison separate from the outside. Although restorative counsellors and family and mother-child officers generally feel supported by their management in their respective CF, even in these CFs there is still a very lopsided ratio of security-oriented versus recovery-oriented staff. This is illustrative of the prevailing culture.



LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

Besides research, awareness-raising, and education activities, the Our Stories Matter project also implements various forms of child participation itself. These activities have led not only to valuable insights on the experiences of children with a parent in prison, but also to important lessons on the pros and cons of different methodologies and the necessary flexibility and creativity to realise meaningful child participation for this target group.

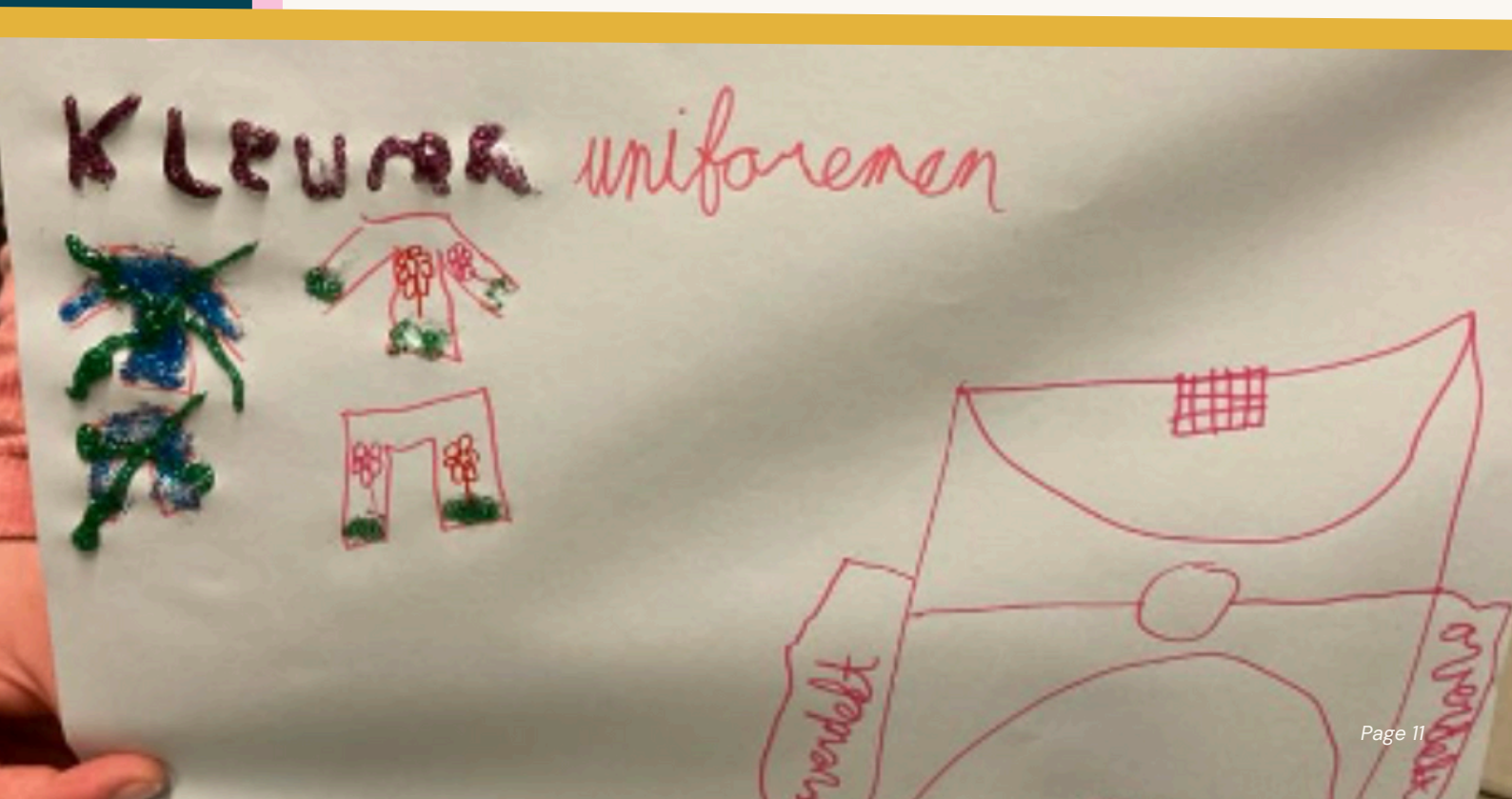
First, two sessions of the Dreamboard activity were organised in Zaanstad Prison. Although the activity was perceived positively by participants, challenges during the recruitment process raised some questions about the accessibility of the activity. The format required a larger group of children to come together under the supervision of their parents on a day outside the monthly parent-child days, which in practice did not prove feasible for all families. During the week, children are at school during the day and fathers do not have an evening programme, so activities could only be planned during weekends or holidays. However, children often already have other activities planned on the weekends and, due to understaffing, there sometimes is insufficient staff available within the CFs on the weekends to organise such activities. Also, these activities require a lot of time and energy from both the children and the caregiving parent or caregiver, who are often already under high stress and experience less space to participate in such activities. As a result, this activity proved to be not equally accessible to all children.

To address this concern, the 'My Story' diary was created as an additional data collection method. The booklets could be distributed during Exodus' Spring and Autumn camps, meaning this method required no extra time from participating families. However, a downside was that the booklet was not always a priority within the busy programme. Furthermore, there was no professional guidance for completing the diary and the volunteers present could not always be with the children to support them in this. As a result, explanations could not always be given when things were unclear. Additionally, some questions proved too confrontational, with children not yet seeming ready to answer the question. As a result, the questions were not always completed (in full), including the last question in the booklet which corresponded to the Dreamboard activity: *'If you were the director of this place for one day, what would you change to make it more fun for children?'*

Finally, to get as complete a picture as possible, this question was also submitted to the Soundboard Group of Expertisecentrum K I N D. This group of adults with lived experience is in a unique position to make rich and valuable contributions to child participation. Through their own experiences, they have very good insight into the perspective of children with a parent in prison, but because of their adult age, some of the practical barriers and security considerations that apply to children can be circumvented. While consulting adults with lived experience by itself is insufficient to meet the standard for child participation set out in Article 12 of the UNCRC, they can serve an important complementary function in participatory processes.

Our experience with these participation activities shows that different forms of participation have their own advantages and disadvantages, and providing different forms improves inclusivity and opportunity for participation. Despite the challenges, all the activities have provided very rich and valuable insights about the experiences of children with a parent in prison and their ideas, wishes and thoughts around prison. The results of these activities and the COPE survey can be found at

<https://expertisecentrumkind.nl/2024/12/04/kindparticipatie-our-stories-matter/> (only available in Dutch)



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While significant progress has been made in recent years in making prisons more child-friendly and raising awareness of its importance, there remains room for improvement in the area of child participation in the Dutch correctional context. To safeguard the further development of child-friendliness, it is important to also invest in child participation. After all, child-friendliness and child participation go hand in hand: child participation cannot meet the standard prescribed in UNCRC Article 12 if it is not implemented in a child-friendly manner, while the child-friendliness of a prison cannot be guaranteed without consulting children.

To support this process, this section presents several targeted recommendations that strive to be progressive but realistic, with an eye for practical challenges. Given the many differences between CFs in size, regimes, target groups and other factors, it is difficult to offer ready-made, universally applicable recommendations. For this reason, the recommendations are broad and general and require evaluation at the CF level to determine how they can be implemented appropriately in that specific context. The recommendations have been categorised based on the elements of the Lundy model. In drafting these recommendations, the Youth Club and the Soundboard Group of Expertisecentrum K I N D were also consulted to ensure that children's perspectives are central to the recommendations. Furthermore, Annex II outlines various resources that can provide further support in implementing child participation.



INTENT

Intent:

- Establish a clear policy vision for child participation at national (DJI), local (CF), and organisational levels (civil society/academic organisations and initiatives), setting out concrete guidelines and objectives for systematic and structural forms of participation. Recognise in this policy that child participation is an integral part of the CF's regular work, and not considered an additional task.
 - Ensure that an appropriate budget is made available to meet the expectations and objectives set out in the policy.
 - Forms of participation do not need be large-scale or formal to meet the elements of the Lundy model. More informal methods such as a debrief, simple questionnaire with smileys or colour coding, a suggestion box or a noticeboard can also suffice provided they take place under the right conditions and with appropriate feedback. Not all activities need to be grand or expensive to be valuable for children with a parent in prison.
 - Invest in awareness and training on the importance of child-friendliness and child participation among CF staff who come into contact with children with a parent in prison.
- The Our Stories Matter project group is currently developing an e-learning module for CF staff on child participation in detention decisions that can be used for these purposes. Publication of the Dutch version of the e-learning module is scheduled for mid-2025, options for translation in English are being explored by the project group. More information on other resources can be found in Annex II.
- In information materials for families of detainees, emphasise the right of children to participate and the opportunities offered for participation. In the case of CF-specific materials, also indicate who is the contact person on this within the CF (also see 'Space'). This information can be offered in several ways, for example through posters in visitation rooms, children's books developed for children with a parent in prison or other information materials given to families.
 - At the CF level, maintain good relationships between all the different organisations involved in parent-child contact so that there can be open communication with each other on children's feedback and, where possible, cooperation on child participation. This can be done, for example, through an inter-organisational consultation on a regular basis at CF level, in which all organisations that come into contact with children participate. Ideally, a management representative should also participate in these consultations or alternatively be kept informed through a report. If possible, the voluntary participation of children themselves in such consultations can also be very valuable.

SPACE

Space:

- Ensure that participation activities always take place in a child-friendly environment. This concerns not only the physical space where the activity takes place, but also the people providing the activity. For example, working with an experiential expert (i.e. an adult who had a parent in detention in his/her childhood) can contribute to a safe environment, provided they have the right (professional) background to work responsibly with children.
- Ensure that there is a clear point of contact for children and their parents for questions regarding participation opportunities or giving spontaneous feedback. This can be communicated, for example, through posters with a photo of the responsible CF staff member or other information materials given to families.
- Be aware that building trust between the responsible CF staff member, children with a parent in prison and their parents is very important for motivation to participate and the child's safety during activities. This trust can be strengthened by treating children and their parents respectfully, taking the time to explain why child participation is important and emphasising that participation will not have a negative impact on the detained parent.
- For activities, communicate clearly and transparently exactly what will happen, what the mutual expectations are and that participation in the activities is voluntary. Lack of clarity and inconsistency is perceived as frustrating and confusing by children. Furthermore, emphasising voluntariness of participation within the correctional context is especially important because in addition to the inherent power difference between adults and children, the role of the CF as the institution that oversees their parent's incarceration plays a role as well. Also, keep in mind that children need to have the appropriate prior knowledge and information to be able to give informed consent.
- Keep in mind that each child is different and they have different support needs to safely participate. For example, research shows that there are gender differences in the impact of parental detention on boys and girls, with them being vulnerable in different ways.¹² Age is also an important factor to consider in creating a child-friendly and safe space for participation.
- It is very important that children's participation in participation activities in no way infringes on opportunities for contact between children and detained parent (these moments are too rare and precious).

12. For more information, see Smith, P. S., & Smith, P. S. (2014). The Problems and Reactions of Prisoners' Children: A Review of Research. In: *When the innocent are punished* (pp. 48–81). Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Voice

- Offer children different means and opportunities to participate so that they can find an appropriate form suited to their age, personality and interests. For example, forms of participation with game elements may lend themselves more to younger children, while the use of social media and apps may be of interest to older children and adolescents. Ensure that each form is provided with appropriate guidance and support needed for expected participation in the activity.
- Consider using creative forms of expression alongside more traditional feedback methods, such as drawing assignments, art projects, roleplay activities or through use of technology such as apps. These methods are often less intimidating for children to engage in because they emphasise creativity and fun.
- In designing feedback methods and assessment tools, always ask for children's input regarding their preferences and test tools among children.
- It may be relevant to consult other target groups to complement forms of children's participation. Adults with lived experience can make unique and valuable contributions to activities. In addition, for some topics it can be sufficient to consult children regardless of whether they have a parent in detention, for example when it comes to a child-friendly appearance of visiting rooms.

VOICE & AUDIENCE

Audience

- Through policy pertaining to participation, establish to whom collected insights from observations and feedback will be communicated, in what form they will be reported and through what process. In doing so, also establish a clear timeline stating how regularly the insights are shared with this audience, within what time frame a response is expected and who and how this response is reported back (see also 'Influence').
- It is important that the person or institution receiving the feedback of children also has the authority to make or influence decisions. The active involvement of prison management in listening and acting on the feedback collected in participatory processes is an essential and indispensable part of child participation.
- Always communicate clearly to children participating in an activity with whom the feedback collected will be shared. This can be done verbally or in writing or through creative methods such as drawings and other visual means, preferably by someone from the CF or a collaborating organisation experienced in working with children.

INFLUENCE

Influence:

- Child participation is meaningful only when children's input is seriously considered and there is transparency on how their views are taken into account. Therefore, ensure that policy establishes how children's input should be included in considerations that affect them.
- Always ensure that feedback is given in a child-friendly way on how children's input was taken into account, what impact it had on decision-making and why the final decision was chosen. This can be done verbally or in writing, or through creative methods such as drawings and other visual means. Establish in the policy the timeframe within which this feedback should take place and who is responsible to do so.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: CONTRIBUTIONS BY CHILDREN WITH A PARENT IN PRISON

In conclusion, the project team would like to close this report by giving the floor to children with a parent in prison. Their voices remind us why child participation in the prison context is essential. Below we share the messages of the Youth Club and the Soundboard Group of Expertisecentrum K I N D to prison management and what they hope for the future.

What would you like to tell prison management?

"Dear management, I hope you really realise that the children of a parent in detention also need attention and should be taken seriously. We cannot help being children of a parent in detention. It has not been our choice, but we have to live with it. After all, it is still our mum or dad, just as you have or used to have a mum or dad. Treat us as you also want to be treated, and then everything should be fine."

"Imagine you end up in prison tomorrow and your child comes to visit you. How would you want the CF to treat your child?"

What do you hope for the future?

"I hope for the future that certain things will change and children of a parent in detention will actually be heard."

"That children who are often voiceless will be given a voice. You matter."



ANNEX I: OVERVIEW OF ORGANISATIONS AND INITIATIVES IN THE NETHERLANDS AIMED AT CHILDREN WITH A PARENT IN PRISON

NB. WHILE THIS OVERVIEW HAS BEEN CAREFULLY COMPILED BASED ON DESK RESEARCH AND INTERVIEWS, IT IS NOT INTENDED TO BE AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST OF ALL ORGANISATIONS WORKING ON THIS TOPIC. THERE MAY BE ORGANISATIONS THAT, DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF THE PROJECT GROUP, ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THIS LIST.

aXiehuis	https://axiehuis.nl/
Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen	https://www.dji.nl/
Betere Start (Universiteit Utrecht)	https://www.nji.nl/interventies/betere-start
De Sluis	https://dsgdesluis.nl/
Ent Design	https://entdesign.nl/
Exodus	https://exodus.nl/
Expertisecentrum K I N D	https://expertisecentrumkind.nl/
Facebookgroep Achterblijvers na Detentie	https://www.facebook.com/groups/234225023588926
Gevangenzorg Nederland	https://gevangenzorg.nl/
Gezinsbenadering (Hanzehogeschool Groningen & DJI)	https://www.gezinsbenadering.nl/
Humanitas	https://www.humanitas.nl/
Kinderen en gedetineerde vaders (Open Universiteit Nederland & Expertisecentrum K I N D)	https://sway.cloud.microsoft/3FEA7yldILFnBmaZ?ref=Link
Let's Get Loud (PI Nieuwegein)	-
NOT MY CRIME	https://notmycrime.nl/
Ouder in Detentie (Avans Hogeschool, Exodus, Expertisecentrum K I N D, PI Dordrecht, PI Vught, Gemeente Breda, & Gemeente Den Haag)	https://ouderindetentie.nl/
Puinruimen (DJI)	https://magazines.dji.nl/djizien/2019/11/herstelconsulent
Stichting S.A.N.G.	https://www.stichtingsang.nl/
Systeemgericht werken (PI Arnhem)	https://magazines.dji.nl/djizien/2019/07/systeemgericht-werken#:~:text=Om%20die%20reden%20is%20in,vastgelopen%20situaties%20in%20een%20netwerk
Vader Blijf Je (Avans Hogeschool)	https://www.veiligheidenveerkracht.nl/projecten/vader-moeder-blijf-je-ook-binnen-de-muren/

ANNEX II: FURTHER RESOURCES

- Report 'Child Participation when a parent is in conflict with the law' by Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE):
<https://childrenofprisoners.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2023-Child-Participation-Report.pdf>
- Report 'Implementation Guidance Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec (2018)5 on Children of Imprisoned Parents' by de European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services (EuroPris), in het bijzonder hoofdstuk 4 'Child's Voice':
https://www.europris.org/wp-content/uploads/ep_library/Implementation-Guidance-report-2021-1.pdf
- Evaluation tool 'Child Impact Assessment Framework' by Prison Reform Trust:
<https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/project/women-the-criminal-justice-system/child-impact-assessment-project/>
- Evaluation tool 'Child Participation Assessment Tool' by the Council of Europe:
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/child-participation-assessment-tool>
- Informational page 'An overview of child participation: Key issues for organisations and practitioners' by Emerging Minds:
<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/an-overview-of-child-participation-key-issues-for-organisations-and-practitioners/>