

JANUARY 2024



BES(t) 4 KIDS

THE BEST OF BES(t) 4 KIDS

A reflection on five years of building together to improve childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands



INTERVIEWS
MILESTONES
SUCCESSSES
CHALLENGES
LESSONS
LEARNED



COLOPHON

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Foreword

The BES(t) 4 kids program exists now for five years. It is a unique program where, together with all stakeholders, we are building to improve the quality and (financial) accessibility of childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands. Big and small steps are being taken, mistakes are being made, and successes achieved. We are learning a lot, both with and about each other. In this magazine, we will share stories and practical lessons learned. We are proud of the steps that have been made and look forward to the continuation and the future with confidence.



As you read this magazine, you may notice how committed everyone working and contributing to the steady improvement of the quality of childcare is. What strikes us time and again is the drive and enthusiasm of everyone involved. We are extremely proud of everyone who contributes to the program: the childcare organizations, pedagogical professionals, project leaders, and many others. Whether it is about the development of legislation that considers the local context, setting up the supervision and care structure, the solution of housing issues or the improvement of the quality, everyone cooperates with respect for each other's position and expertise. With the knowledge that together we can organize the best childcare. Based on the conviction that this will ensure happy, healthy children and happy parents, and thus a future in which every child has the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

The work is certainly not finished yet. In the coming years, together we will continue to build a better future for all children in the Caribbean Netherlands. We hope you will enjoy reading this magazine. We hope this magazine will also inspire you in terms of future collaborations with and between Bonaire, St. Eustatius, Saba, and the Central Government.

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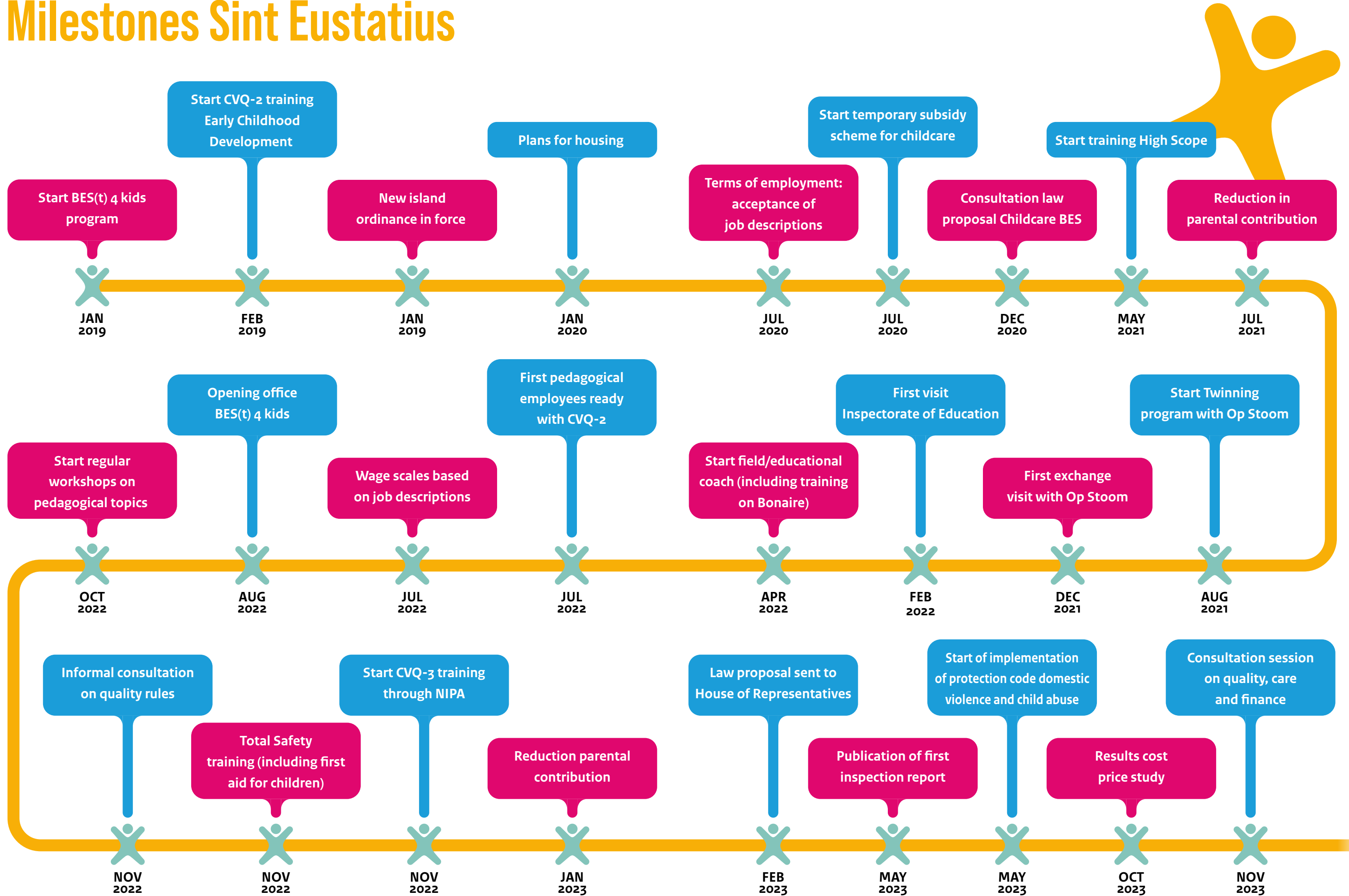


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Angela Dekker

PROJECT LEADER BES(t) 4 KIDS
ST. EUSTATIUS



“Five years ago, we started rolling out BES(t) 4 kids on St. Eustatius. We have taken huge steps in which cooperation is the basis. As project leader, I see my main task as spider-in-the-web between all parts of the program. I ensure support and feedback from the field and coordinate the roll-out on the island. To this end, I work closely with the seven childcare organizations within the BES(t) 4 kids Statia platform. In addition, I am the link between the policymakers in the Netherlands and the local government. I meet a lot with the responsible Director Social Domain on the island to see whether the new laws and regulations fit with local government policy. I understand that we want to have a broad law for the Caribbean Netherlands, but we cannot avoid regulating some things specifically. Therefore, these will be included in the island ordinance.

Cooperation

The Netherlands sometimes wants one model for all islands or to regulate too much centrally. However, ‘one size fits all’ does not work because background, culture, religion and language on the islands differ too much from each other. For example, each island should have its own confidential advisor for reporting child abuse. Another example is host parenting. We do not opt for this type of childcare on St. Eustatius. It is very difficult to accommodate children in a residential home in the right way according to the desired quality standards. We also talk about this with the other islands so that we can help each other. Every other week we have a project leader meeting where we discuss the common interests of the islands but also individual needs. It is an intensive collabora-

tion to coordinate on, for instance, the subsidy, such as the amount, distribution and implementation, but also on providing training for the application. The cost survey helps to gain insight per island. Another added value of the cooperation between the islands is the mutual exchange. For instance, each island has a local inspector to guard, monitor and adjust quality. There is good cooperation with the Inspectorate of Education in the Netherlands, which visits us annually. We are now looking at rotating the local inspectors on the islands.

Creative solutions

The nice thing about the program is that the four ministries involved work cross-departmental. We had no training opportunities for the required level

for pedagogical staff, for instance, due to the small scale. So we started looking for solutions in the region. We started discussions with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science for subsidy oppor-

“The Netherlands sometimes wants one model for all islands or to regulate too much centrally. However, ‘one size fits all’ does not work...”

tunities. By mutual agreement, we managed to make training possible locally. We started with level 2 and are now developing this into a training offer at level 3. We have got it right for now, but together

we need to ensure that funds remain. Even after the BES(t) 4 kids program is completed.

For plus care, we are working intensively with the ministries of VWS and OCW. This part for improving the quality of care is a huge challenge. The pilot went with the necessary bumps, but we managed to get the procedures clear. We want to start anchoring these in the system. Because it is



a small island, we do not have all specialisms at our disposal and that requires creative solutions. It takes time to get the whole process in order. We sometimes try to do too much at once, but we also have to consider the responsibilities we can actually bear as an island.

Successes

The biggest success is that quality care is now possible for every child. We have a fixed amount at our disposal to guarantee quality. And for parents, childcare is affordable. We are working hard on hygiene, safety and enough space, indoors and outdoors, for the children. For pedagogical work, we have great support from our twinning partner. We learn a lot from each other. Not only professionally, but through the mostly personal contacts we also see individual growth and development. An enrichment for both parties through the opportunity to gain experience across borders. Communication is also more professional. You can see it among staff, managements and the board. There is a realization that there are resources available whereby we are building on the capabilities of this island. Together we are going to make sure that this subsidy will cover and continue. I like being able to say to people here ‘you are a professional’. We are doing well on Statia.”

Carol Jack-Roosberg

DIRECTOR SOCIAL
DOMAIN PUBLIC
ENTITY ST. EUSTATIUS



“In the past childcare was part of the many governmental tasks we have on St. Eustatius. The BES(t) 4 kids program has given us the opportunity for better quality. The program offers our people the possibility of a higher level of education and therefore a higher salary. For parents childcare has become more affordable and accessible. Nowadays childcare centres are one of the priority areas for the island Government.

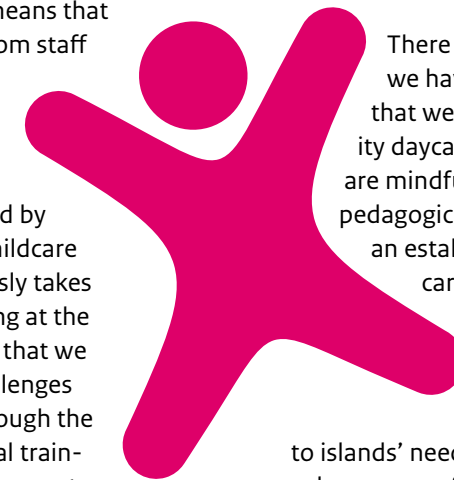


We started the program by involving all stakeholders. After official consultations, we pitched the ideas to the various foundation boards of daycare providers. Everyone had a voice in the process. We gave the direction in which we invited all stakeholders to share their ideas. For example, what are you still missing? What would you like? How can we support you? To maintain support base and secure the program a platform has been created with representatives of all organizations, including early stimulation programs. We meet monthly to discuss experiences, challenges, and opportunities. During these sessions updates are given by the project leader.

One of the challenges we face is motivating childcare staff members. We are in a process of change and that requires change in behavior. Because of the new requirements, the level of training must go up. This means that we require commitment from staff through extra training. Everyone, both existing and new staff, must meet the new educational requirements as established by the Island Ordinance for Childcare Organizations. This obviously takes time. We can't do everything at the same time. I am convinced that we can do it together. Our challenges are also our successes. Through the program we have additional training, we work on the improvement

of labor conditions and uniformed job descriptions for pedagogical staff. Through the Twinning program staff members are able to exchange knowledge and gain expertise with colleagues from the Netherlands. The program has provided the means to purchase age suitable equipment for the centres and to run a pilot program on Integral Care for children who may have special needs.

“Our challenges are also our successes. Through the program we have additional training, we work on the improvement of labor conditions and uniformed job descriptions for pedagogical staff.”



There are still improvements to be made, we have great ambitions. But we can say that we are on our way to affordable quality daycare for children on our island. We are mindful of the value of the work of the pedagogical staff. Every childcare center has an established pedagogical vision. Better care creates better opportunities for children and their development. For me, the most important lessons learned are to be patient, customize the program to islands' needs and to set our own pace. We color our own future. I am proud of Statia.”

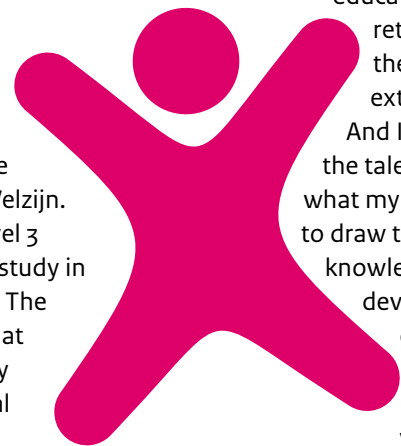
Rosalie Edelstein-Lopes

DIRECTOR BUZZY BEES

“The program has brought a lot to St. Eustatius including a project leader especially for our island. All three islands are Caribbean Netherlands, but totally different in culture and background. Angela Dekker has worked here for years and knows the island. All Stadians know her. You have to live, work and participate in the community here to be respected. And we have that on Statia for her. She has done a lot for cooperation by bringing structure and shaping the childcare policy. We work together through the Platform BES(t) 4 kids Statia in which all the childcare organizations and the elementary schools participate. We draw up strategies but also make the job descriptions for different positions, with an appropriate salary. We provide training courses, for example, on abuse. That can take many forms both physically and mentally so also by swearing and shouting. Training creates awareness in one’s own behavior and that is important for our daily work. Each childcare organization has its own vision, but at the base we are the same. Anchored in the island regulations, these are the foundations for developing our children.

Training and development

Most of the staff at Buzzy Bees was underqualified. Until recently, on St. Eustatius it was only possible to obtain level 2 at MBO Zorg en Welzijn. BES(t) 4 kids provided access to level 3 education. People are now able to study in the language spoken here, English. The teachers are from the island and that works. Training is relevant, not only for knowledge but also for personal development. Salaries are better because we can scale up by education level. We come from a time when workers had to wait for their salaries until all parents paid for childcare. If they didn’t have money, there was no salary. We are laying down the new arrangements in a collective labor agreement.



Another important innovation is the meeting structure. In addition to the platform meeting, we have a field coordinator who provides support. We are no longer alone but solve issues together. Support is available for children who need plus care. Incredibly important for development because early identification and addressing problems have a great effect on later development. The Twinning program helps with this. We learn from each other and exchange knowledge and experience. The advantage of our small island is that we all work together.

“We are not done yet. Before the program is complete, the local government must have anchored the care system. Therefore, we are looking for good leaders to communicate the vision and passion.”

Utilizing talents

Coming from the Netherlands, I worked in education for a long time. We started in St. Eustatius over ten years ago to raise the basic quality. Subsequently, I was responsible for the transition from the Dutch to the English system in secondary education. I was actually going to retire when I was asked to be the director for Buzzy Bees. I am extremely driven and ambitious. And I want to use that to develop the talents of staff members. I know what my people can do here and I want to draw that out. By using each other’s knowledge and expertise. Further developing relationships through communication. Encouraging students and making them aware that training is relevant which opens up many more opportunities. To build quality through team meetings, feedback and asking open questions. Solving problems by talking openly with each other. Through the program there are trainings and workshops. Like the professionalization workshop to better separate business and per-



sonal life. People also bring their misery to work. With this workshop, I teach them to deal with that more effectively. I show people that they are important. They are at the basis of children’s development and opportunities.

Future challenges

We are not done yet. Before the program is complete, the local government must have anchored the care system. Therefore, we are looking for good leaders to communicate the vision and passion. So that we can continuously develop by, for instance, linking child development to youth development and providing training opportunities at Level 4. And we should also share our expertise outside the islands of the Caribbean Netherlands. There are a lot of small islands around here, but together we are big. We should not remain dependent on subsidies, but do it ourselves. Statia is a community that we need to strengthen. And we are working hard for that with a team of people. The people here deserve a flag for their efforts. My heart is forever attached to this island. They once called me the Dutch girl. I am proud to have become a Stadian.”

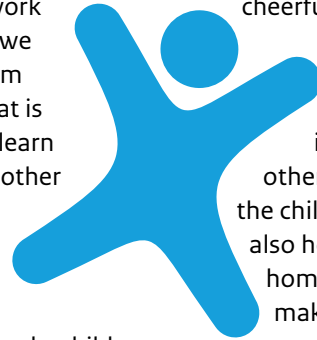


Pedagogical employees

BUZZY BEES

“The program has changed quite a lot for us. We are getting better training. First we could only do this at level 2, but now we can do it at level 3. The teachers are from the island so they understand how things work here. Through Twinning, we have an exchange program with the Netherlands. That is fun and educational. We learn from them, for example, other development methods through playing. They learn from us that you can do a lot with few resources. In the Netherlands, children attend childcare less often. Here, children usually come five days a week

because both parents work full-time. We have noticed that the children here are more active and lively, but maybe that also has to do with our culture. At Buzzy Bees, everyone is always cheerful.



Mutual cooperation at our childcare center has improved. We talk to each other a lot more. Not only about the children’s development but also how things are going at home. We exchange ideas and make plans together. We are more transparent and open with each other. When you take over a group, there is a handover plan for the

children. So you know how a child is doing or what to look out for. We pay a lot of attention to keeping children engaged in different ways. We alternate between games, learning, eating and sleeping. We have more intensive discussions with parents about parenting. Also if plus care is needed. There is more individual time for a child who needs extra attention. The advantage of a small island is that the childcare organizations can help each other, for instance by lending staff.

We still could use more materials. That is difficult on St. Eustatius. Everything has to be ordered abroad. It sometimes takes a long time. We do have new safe beds for the babies but it would be nice to have more strollers so we can take the little ones to other places like the park. Our cook is a miracle worker. She manages to prepare a creative healthy meal every day with sometimes few ingredients available here. The children enjoy the food. About the future we can be brief. We don’t know. We live today to give our children the best.”

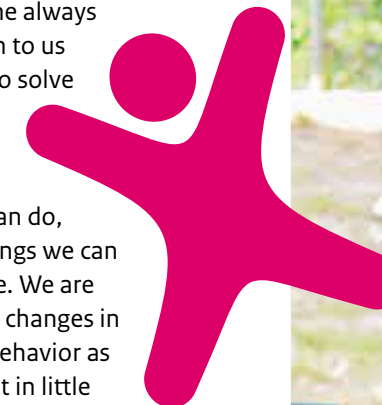


Aron Lijfrock

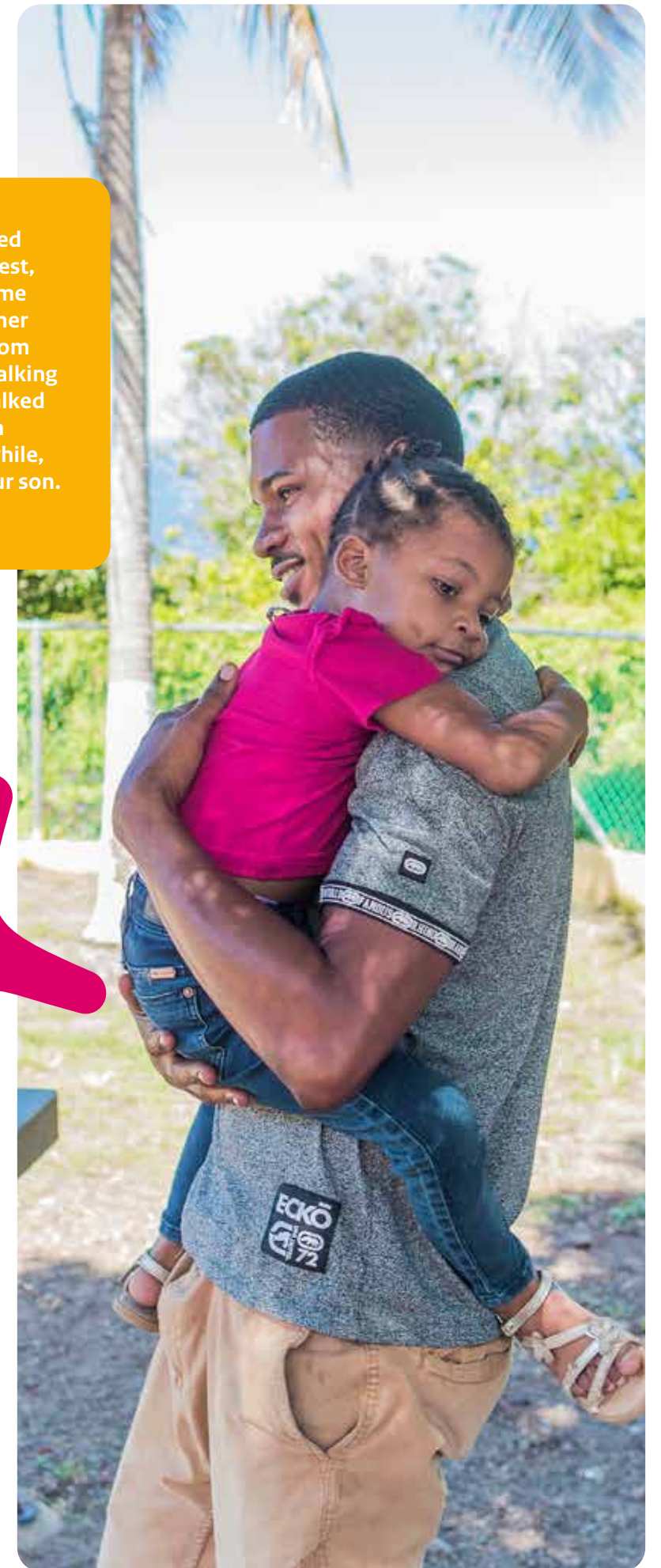
PARENT BUZZY BEES

“After the birth of our daughter, we started looking for a childcare center. To be honest, Buzzy Bees did not have such a good name on the island. Therefore, we chose another daycare. Because this one was farther from home and more expensive, we started talking to Buzzy Bees after a few months. We talked with the director and decided to give it a chance. Our daughter never left. Meanwhile, the daycare also started looking after our son. It is a nice place for both kids.

Our daughter needs extra care because she needs more time than other children to develop. She therefore receives extra individual support from a specially trained staff member. With her we have open conversations about her development. She always has time to listen to us and offers help to solve problems. We talk about the extra things the daycare center can do, as well as the things we can improve at home. We are noticing positive changes in our daughter’s behavior as a result. We see it in little things like fine motoric skills. She is starting to draw with different colors. We see her counting things at home. We are incredibly grateful for her guidance at Buzzy Bees.



We also notice that childcare is more affordable. Especially for parents who have to do it alone. And it’s nice that everything is open to discussion. We are also going to set up a parent/caregiver meeting so we can share our ideas. In any case, our children are happy with the care. Every morning they are excited. They love playing with the other children and the guidance. They have the freedom at Buzzy Bees to be completely themselves.”





“Together with Maritza Hassel, I started childcare organization Daughters of the King in 2013. We were concerned about the future of girls due to the considerable number of teen pregnancy and promiscuous behavior. Initially, our after-school care was primarily intended to be a safe place for teenage girls. We also wanted to support the mostly single mothers with raising their daughters. Most of them work full-time or have multiple jobs to make ends meet. That almost makes it impossible for them to set a good example themselves. We noticed that girls have even better opportunities to develop if you start at an early age with the right role models. Moreover, the community on St. Eustatius was very enthusiastic about our initiative. We now take in girls from the age of 5. We consciously choose to do so because children under that age need different care.

Elene Jeffrey

OWNER DAUGHTERS OF THE KING

Developing

At that time, when Maritza left the island for work after six months, I continued with the childcare center on my own. That was quite a challenge because there was no support at that time. For the first three years I financed the organization from my own pocket and we moved from one location to another. For a while we were in an abandoned church that was obviously not equipped to take care of children. There

was hardly any equipment available so we had to make do with what we had. However, I wanted to persevere to give my vulnerable group of girls a happy place where we could talk openly with each other with room for growth and development. It was therefore nice that after applying to the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport in 2016, I received budget. With that, I could start developing.

Professionalizing

In 2018, the BES(t) 4 kids program was added. Then I was able to really start professionalizing. Everything suddenly accelerated. I am so incredibly happy with the program. It provides structure and clear guidelines. We have made a huge positive development. Because of the financial support, childcare is now more affordable, we have suitable materials and can offer healthy meals. Training both management and

staff increase the quality of care. And because of the structure offered, everything is now much better documented and organized which makes managing the organization easier for me. The people at BES(t) 4 kids are always there for you and offer me support when needed. I have no words for the gratitude I have for project leader Angela Dekker. She is there for me day and night, always answering my questions and she knows an awful lot. She is a true mentor and inspiration to me.



Structure

I do not see the program’s guidelines as requirements. For me, they are tools to improve quality. If you want to grow to a certain level, you have to be willing to take several steps.

That includes evaluation by the inspection. The nice thing about that is that you learn in a structured way to work in the right way. The program gives me a lot of footing. Of course there were challenges like qualifying staff. They had to go back to school. However, training offers them better opportunities and personal growth. Another challenge was involving parents in the changing structure.

They were initially concerned because they had to provide information about their children. I was able to explain to them that in this way we could start to improve the level of quality and therefore care for their children. Parents see the positive developments and childcare has become more affordable.

Bright future

Things are getting better and better for Daughters of the King. I hope we can move to a new suitable permanent location in the coming months. BES(t) 4 kids does a lot for us. Therefore, I am not worried about the future. I see it brightly. I will continue to support and teach the girls to stand up for themselves. To wise independent women who later, like myself, can determine their own future.”

“BES(t) 4 kids offers a good program. For parents it is nice to have a safe high-quality after-school program for their children. We work with an extensive daily activity plan. Homework is done until three o’clock. After schoolwork, there is time for dancing, crafts and games. We also make sure children are taken to their sports clubs or music lessons. We now write plans that we stick to. This makes organizing a lot easier, but we also lose flexibility by working with these plans. There is little room for improvisation. Because of cultural differences there are different views on parenting. The Dutch way was new to me.

I sometimes feel that all these activities are a little bit too much for the children. They are tired from school and prefer to just play with each other. Working in childcare is responsible work. Children usually come over five days a week because parents have to work full-time. This requires not only supervision but also pedagogical commitment from the staff. It is therefore good that there are higher requirements for staff.

These new requirements are sometimes very difficult to combine with the home situation. I communicate about that with my colleagues. Most of us have a family, many of them run single-parent families. Almost all of us work full-time because the salary is too low to make ends meet. Per year, we get 15 vacation days. On top of that, studying is tough. You don’t have enough time left to spend with your own children.

“It is therefore good that there are higher requirements for staff.”

Because of my love for children, I started working in an after-school daycare center three years ago. At that time, it suited my home situation perfectly. I had time off when my son was free from school. In the meanwhile, I could help and make other children happy during the day. With the new demands the situation has changed. I don’t know what the future brings for me. Making a career in childcare is difficult. The island is too small. I hope basic facilities will be improved. Flexible working hours, days off for study and school holidays and a fair salary. Not only to improve the quality of childcare but also of our lives. A safe fine environment for everyone.”

Kiara Sanchez

PEDAGOGICAL WORKER
DAUGHTERS OF THE KING



Wilma van Zoest

PARENT DAUGHTERS OF THE KING

“My daughter is well cared for at Daughters of the King, an after-school program for girls only. They work according to the philosophy that development is important for every child, but for girls in particular. Their goal is to give them a solid foundation so they have the opportunity to grow up to be responsible young women with equal opportunities. For me as a mother, it is nice to know that she is safe at the ASC.

Through meetings I am involved in the policy. We talk about educational support, activity plans, and basically everything



that happens at the after-school program. We can then give our input. Every day we are kept up to date via a whatsapp group. This is about excursions, but also about opening hours, for instance. I talk about my daughter’s development one-on-one with her pedagogical supervisor.

In recent years, the care has been professionalized. You can notice that by the way the children are treated. Most of the staff are now qualified. Attention is paid to healthy food, for instance, by eating fruit and a healthy snack in the afternoon. For me as a parent, the price has decreased slightly. Right now, I wouldn’t want to do things differently. The most important thing for me is that my daughter likes it there. It’s her second home.”

Paula Pandt-Pompier

PEDAGOGICAL COACH



“I work as a pedagogical coach for all childcare centres at St. Eustatius. Working alongside the director of Social Domain and the project leader of BES(t) 4 kids, we aim to strengthen the the quality of childcare. My role involves observing, analyzing and developing ideas to enhance the quality of daycare, actively contributing to the professional development of pedagogical staff member and to spread the love for professions in childcare. This is done through regular visits to childcare organizations, planned workshops, conducting one-on-one coaching interviews, and fostering open conversations, all aimed at promoting personal growth and improving the quality of childcare services.

What I value about the program is the twinning initiative, which allows me the possibility to engage in enriched exchanges with colleagues in the Netherlands (Op Stoom). This collaboration enhances my ability to implement effective pedagogical strategies in my coaching, fostering both personal growth and quality within childcare practices. Dutch methods serve as eye-openers; while they can't be copied and pasted, they provide me with new insights that I can adapt for our unique context on to this island. We often face limited resources, which makes it necessary to make choices. A practical example is the creatively reusing of waste materials. Earlier this year, I also participated in collaborative training sessions for pedagogical coaches, at Sentro Akseso on Bonaire. This course has significantly contributed to my personal development

as a coach. Working alongside professionals from other islands not only motivates me but also provides valuable insights that enhance my skills and knowledge.

Together with the project leader, I brainstorm about the way we can introduce innovations, by emphasizing personal development and upholding high-quality standards in childcare. The primary challenge lies in recruiting enough qualified pedagogical staff. Currently, salaries are insufficient, and that does not encourage

“They provide me with new insights that I can adapt for our unique context on to this island.”

people to choose this profession. Especially for single-parent families, it is difficult to make ends meet. Nevertheless, I try to encourage people to start an education. On the one hand, by emphasizing how important our profession is, and on the other hand, by pointing out the salary growth plan from the BES(t) 4 kids program.

Despite the challenges, I maintain a positive outlook and encourage my colleagues to find fulfillment in their work. I firmly believe in the importance of our profession and take pride in contributing to the recognition of childcare's increasing value, shaping a better future for our children.” ▶

“I was immediately excited when I heard about BES(t) 4 kids. From 1995 to 1997 I worked on Statia as manager of The Buzzy Bees Inn, and I enjoyed living on the island. Now I am director of Childcare Op Stoom in the Netherlands (an organization with 60 childcare locations) and have been committed to childcare on St. Eustatius since 2020.

The Twinning we set up together over four years is working well. We started together creating the pedagogical policy, the basis of how we want to guide children, based on emotional safety, personal and social growth for each child. I started in 2020 during covid so we did it digital: conversations about what we think is important for children and trainings on learning by discovery (HighScope).

In our collaboration, a lot of focus is on how you put your pedagogical vision into practice with the children. Childcare where children come five days a week should be a safe place to develop. It is now better seen that childcare has an important role in parenting.

The exchange to 'Op Stoom' in the Netherlands and to the childcare cen-

Linda Blankhorst

TWINNING PARTNER
ST. EUSTATIUS



tres on Statia takes place a few times a year. I really like the friendships that develop between pedagogical staff. They face-time each other, for fun and to spar about work. A lot is possible through digital contact. For example, my colleague provides online coaching and I often call colleagues on Statia to discuss situations or policy choices. I expect that the bond between the pedagogical staff on Statia and Op Stoom will continue to grow. Because of the twinning, more and more professionals are getting to know each other and of course we have a common passion; because we never run out of things to talk about children!” ▶

Mayara Wijsman

LOCAL INSPECTOR AND NURSE

“I work as one of the local inspectors on St. Eustatius. Actually, I am the eyes and ears of the Inspectorate of Education in the Netherlands. On the spot to take immediate action if needed. Because of the small scale of this island, I have several functions with the Health department (GGD). In addition to my work as an inspector, I am also a local nurse for, among other things, Youth Health Care. Because I have different roles, childcare organizations know how to find me. We all know each other here so the lines are short. Inspecting childcare organizations unexpectedly

project leader, we are investigating whether workshops can be held for this purpose. There is not enough qualified staff so we cannot always apply the four-eyes principle. We are working hard on training, but it takes time. It would help if salaries were raised. That’s why establishing a collective labor agreement is incredibly important. For a number of people, living here is a challenge. There are relatively many single-parent families with financial problems. Then doing a study in combination with work for little money is not an option. Childcare housing also needs to improve. Most are in rental housing and buildings that are not suitable.

“As an inspector I try to help the organizations by giving tips and by thinking along in solutions.”



took some time to get used to, but BES(t) 4 kids has been able to make it clear that better quality is good for the island. As an inspector I try to help the organizations by giving tips and by thinking along in solutions.

There are definitely areas of attention. Health and safety are not yet established in policy plans. Simply because the children’s organizations do not know how to do that. In consultation with the

Where quality and cooperation were not always good before, we are making positive steps. Mutual communication is much better and everyone now knows that meeting standards is important. Hygiene has always been a high priority here. Customization will always be necessary. The Dutch model cannot be copied one on one. Step by step we are moving forward. I am proud of my growth as an inspector. We have done a good job together in five years.”



Care structure

“To make inclusive childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands possible, we have developed a structure for care and support within the BES(t) 4 kids program, that has been anchored in the proposal for a new law. This took time and research. Three years ago, we started this pillar of the program. We started by identifying current bottlenecks and concretizing our wishes for children who need extra support within the care facility. That inventory provided building blocks for the care structure as it is now. Parallel to the policy development, a pilot was started on each island. Policy gave direction to these pilots. What we picked up from the pilot we incorporated into the policy. Practice and policy ran side by side and that worked well.

Island needs

The development of a care structure started at the request of the islands. Especially on the Windward Islands where facilities are limited and

Jantine Homan

VWS POLICY OFFICER

expectations towards organizations are often higher, there was a need for more structure. On St. Eustatius, for instance, the Expertise Center for Education Care (ECE) was already informally involved with children with additional support needs in child care. In the care structure pilot, the agreements on roles and responsibilities were further clarified. This finally led to the Expertise Centers on each island becoming the so-called “second line” of the child care structure. This means that they can be approached for advice and diagnostics and to advise the childcare centres on guidance plans for children with additional support needs.

Challenges

In the pilot on St. Eustatius only a small number of children with an extra support need have been taken care of so far. Parents do not always know that extra support in childcare is possible to give their child better chances. Or sometimes parents have difficulties accepting that their child needs extra support.

I can see that the organizations involved on the island - the childcare, ECE and also the Public Entity’s ‘Opvoedwinkel’ - are motivated to support parents. From the steering committee care structure, in which the Ministry of VWS participates, we continue to monitor the care structure for childcare. We have been able to make considerable steps together. And I am proud of that.”

Mieke Jansen

PROJECT LEADER BES(t) 4 KIDS
MINISTRY OF OCW

“My task as a project leader includes the preparation of quality requirements that childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands must meet. These are laid down, among other things, in the Childcare BES Legislative Proposal. In many aspects, the quality requirements correspond with the quality requirements in the European Netherlands, but on a number of points we deviate from them to better fit the local context on the islands. For example, we include a part of the surface area of the porch in the number of square metres a childcare facility must have as a minimum, because in the Caribbean Netherlands the porch is part of daily life; it is actually the living room of the house. I experienced this myself during the four years I lived on Bonaire. My time on Bonaire helps me to have an eye for that kind of difference.

Of course we want to comply with the rules in the European Netherlands as much as possible, but sometimes it is more appropriate to align with the local context. Working together within the BES(t) 4 kids program also means looking for the best solution and making compromises.



Regulations

The legislation contains the rules that childcare organizations must comply with. These rules are elaborated further in what we call lower regulations, such as the Island Ordinances. This is up to the islands themselves; they can therefore set additional requirements for some parts. Examples are the educational requirements, healthy nutrition, and the partners with which childcare organizations must cooperate. The legislation provides the basis, but the islands themselves determine the additional requirements. In this way, the islands can also tie in with island-specific issues.

“For example, we include a part of the surface area of the porch in the number of square metres a childcare facility must have as a minimum, because in the Caribbean Netherlands the porch is part of daily life; it is actually the living room of the house.”

Challenges

The scale of the islands is sometimes a challenge, for example for filling positions of trust. On the islands, one person often has several roles and tasks. Everyone knows each other and this can be a barrier to reporting suspected mistreatment or abuse, for example. It is difficult to be independently com-

petent when everything and everyone is intertwined. This has nothing to do with intent, but is the reality of living in small residential communities. These things are then difficult to work out in legislation. But here, too, we are going to find a solution together. In doing so, we will also try to differentiate by island. A challenge, but it certainly has advantages. Because people know each other, cross-pollination takes place easily, and the lines of communication are short. This can also speed up the process.

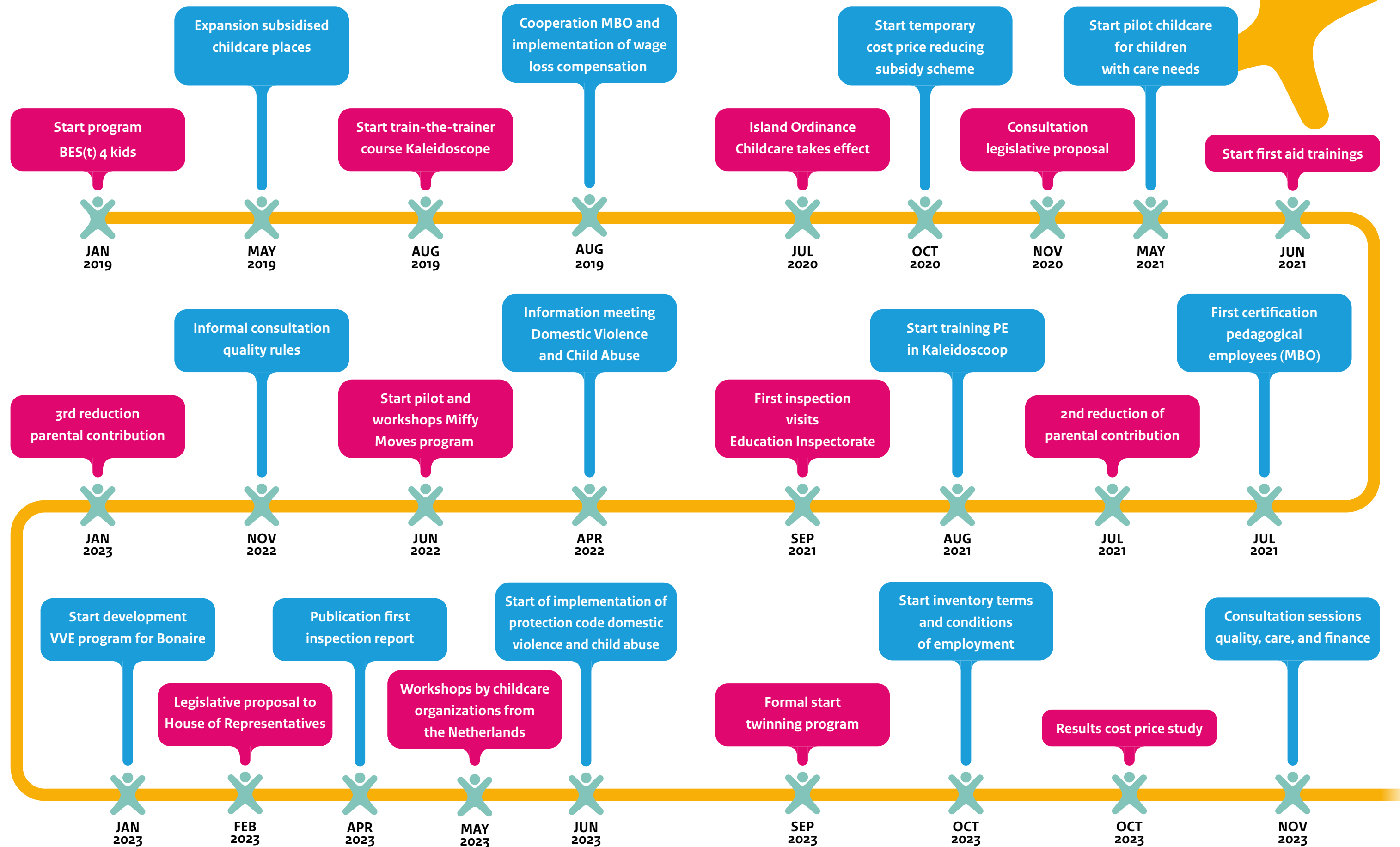
Cooperation and commitment

For the cooperation, it is important that all stakeholders are involved in all steps of the process. This does not only involve the childcare organizations and Public Entities, but also the parents, for example. For instance, we are now working on the preparation of the consultation for the General Order in Council. Several sessions will take place on all three islands to inform stakeholders about the quality requirements, care structure, and finances, among other things. We also did this during the Covid-19 era, i.e. digitally, which made it quite a challenge.

BES(t) 4 kids is a journey we have been on for 5 years. A lot still needs to be done but an awful lot has also been achieved. The quality of childcare has improved and childcare has become more affordable for parents. We have achieved this together, with various ministries, the Public Entities, and childcare organizations. I am proud of this way of cooperating!”



Milestones Bonaire



Tamara Janga-Nicolaas

PROJECT LEADER BES(T) 4 KIDS BONAIRE

Networking

“Before my role as a project leader, I worked as a social worker on Bonaire. Therefore, I know the island inside and out. I know the people, understand the culture, and the common background. It is a social networking role that suits me perfectly. I coordinate and monitor all action plans for the six program lines. This summer, a second project leader started. Her focus is mainly on housing and the care structure, but I remain ultimately responsible for the six lines. On a daily basis, I

“We do not only work on caring for children but also on their development. The groups are smaller and the staff better trained.”

am in contact with all local parties, from policymakers to the childcare centers and parents. I like making my plans from the field so that policy and daily practice match. In my directing role, I am now working with others to prepare the Island Ordinance so that the entire chain of legislation and regulations is aligned.

Communicating

Through my work I got to know an awful lot of people. Bonaire is small and everyone knows each other. So you also get talked to by people outside your work. It is important to always remain professional, even when people express their emotions. Changes sometimes cause tension and discussion. That is why I keep talking to them by keeping the common goal in mind. In doing so, I explain that the program is a process that takes time.

I always remain neutral because the role of all partners is important. Whether they are colleagues from the Central Government, OLB, childcare centres or parents. Communication is key.

Cooperating

The Netherlands is at a distance, but we cooperate intensively. We consult a lot and we receive plenty of space from the islands to provide input. Cooperation is sometimes a challenge, due to the different cultures and a big difference in size and background. For example, one island is faster in the implementation of processes than another. But we always solve it because there is trust to communicate openly with each other. We have learned to respect each other without losing focus. The rotating physical consultation assists in this. Cooperation with chain partners could still be improved. Education and childcare centers do not always know how to find each other. We still have a good role to play there.

Challenges

We want quality and that takes time and money. For instance, a number of childcare organizations still lack entrepreneurial experience.

There is also still a shortage of care, especially for babies. This is because the quality requirements for the very young are higher. We also face a shortage of qualified staff. There are more applications for training, but some of them switch to teaching after their studies because it still pays better. That



is why the OLB is having an inventory carried out in order to arrive at a CLA Childcare.

Housing remains a major challenge on Bonaire. Many organizations are housed in rented accommodation. These are often small houses where a limited number of children can be placed, which implies that care is not profitable. Investing in these properties through renovation is difficult because they are not owned. Business premises are hard to find and the rent is high. The OLB is looking at what other possibilities there may be.

The cooperation within the care structure is progressing well but we are still searching for the form of cooperation with all chain partners. It remains difficult to find places for children with special needs. The pilot project that was started for

this purpose should provide input on how we can arrange this.

Proud

One of the things I am proud of is the decrease of the parental contribution and the increase in the subsidy for host parent care, for example. These are small organizations completely dependent on funding. They are people who care for children out of love with little administrative experience. I am also proud of the cooperation with the childcare organizations. They are critical and therefore keep us on our toes. They give us the practical examples we need to make the policy appropriate. Another success is the improvement in the quality of our childcare. We do not only work on caring for children but also



on their development. The groups are smaller and the staff better trained. You notice the effect on the children, but also on the parents. Despite the many challenges, I see a lot of passion for working with children. I have enormous appreciation for that. Young people have the future!”

“On Bonaire, we consider childcare extremely important. That is why the Executive Council made a start years ago on the incorporation of quality in our Island Ordinance Childcare. We had already been working with a childcare subsidy, there was a budget to buy appropriate educational materials and to train people through the Kaleidoscope method. There were two subsidised childcare organizations, one in Kralendijk and one in Rincon. However, the funding for the childcare system had not yet been secured in our system.

“The childcare subsidy is now a social benefit. The program has actually brought everything together so that we now have the preconditions for quality childcare.”

Together, within the BES(t) 4 kids program, we searched for a structure that works well for all parties and securing it in legislation, both for the Caribbean Netherlands in general and also for Bonaire specifically. The childcare subsidy is now a social benefit. The program has actually brought everything together so that we now have the preconditions for quality childcare. From educational resources, the equipment and the number of square metres per child to the pedagogical qualification of the staff and their salaries. There is now a solid foundation with the same quality requirements for all and the same available financial resources. It is generally better organized.

Of course, many challenges remain. For instance, the childcare subsidy system has changed. A childcare organization now receives a higher amount upfront than is settled afterwards against the actual number of children cared for. This means that the income can vary. This requires of



Silvana Janga-Serfilia

DIRECTOR SOCIETY & CARE
PUBLIC ENTITY BONAIRE



childcare providers to think and act more businesslike. From supervising children to being an entrepreneur and an employer. That is also a challenge for us as policymakers because we want to assist them with that. Housing on our island remains difficult. There are few suitable affordable buildings. That is why we are looking into whether we can build a prefabricated complex, following the example of Saba, to accommodate several organizations.

I am most proud of our cooperation. Together with the ministries, despite the different views, we have developed a working method in which we engage in dialogue at the same level, organize working sessions, and are able to negotiate. The islands are genuinely listened to and there is mutual respect. Everyone is engaged to deliver the improvements. We receive support from our twinning partners at both policy and executive levels. This way of cooperating is what makes BES(t) 4 kids a success.”

Ruthmila Sint Jago

POLICY ADVISER PUBLIC ENTITY BONAIRE
AND CHAIR QUALITY COMMITTEE

“Quality and safety of childcare had been on our agenda for a long time, but we did not have enough people and budget for the implementation. The BES(t) 4 kids program has given us the decisiveness to implement these plans. It is a nice cooperation between the different ministries in the Netherlands and the Windward Islands. We are different but we all stand for the same thing, good affordable childcare. Unlike the cooperation with Curacao and Aruba, we as islands of the Caribbean Netherlands are in the same constellation to the Netherlands. And that makes it interesting. Because we are different, we learn a lot from each other.

“In the Netherlands, everything has already been done at least once. Here, many things are new.”

Of course, cooperating was sometimes a challenge. In the Netherlands, everything has already been done at least once. Here, many things are new. Moreover, we have limited manpower with which the required speed is not always achievable. Besides, everyone has their own coloured glasses. As a result, we learn to look at each other. Sparring with each other about structures and how to translate policy into implementation. That makes it interesting. It is an added value to cooperate as different but equal partners.

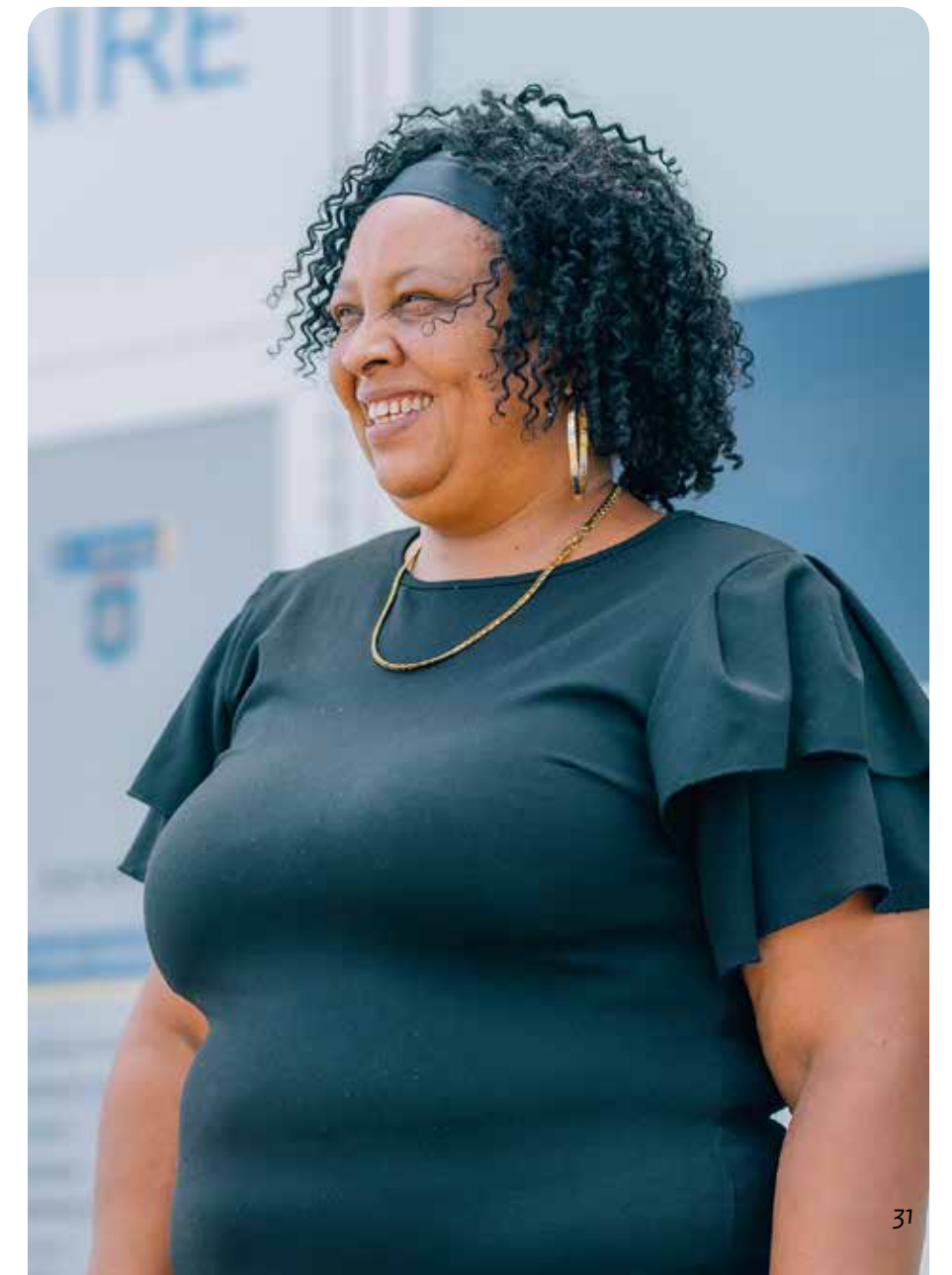
From a policy perspective, the quality committee keeps an eye on the progress of things. We give solicited and unsolicited advice. We used to work with departments. Now we work from a management model. Members of the various boards relevant to childcare and an external expert participate in

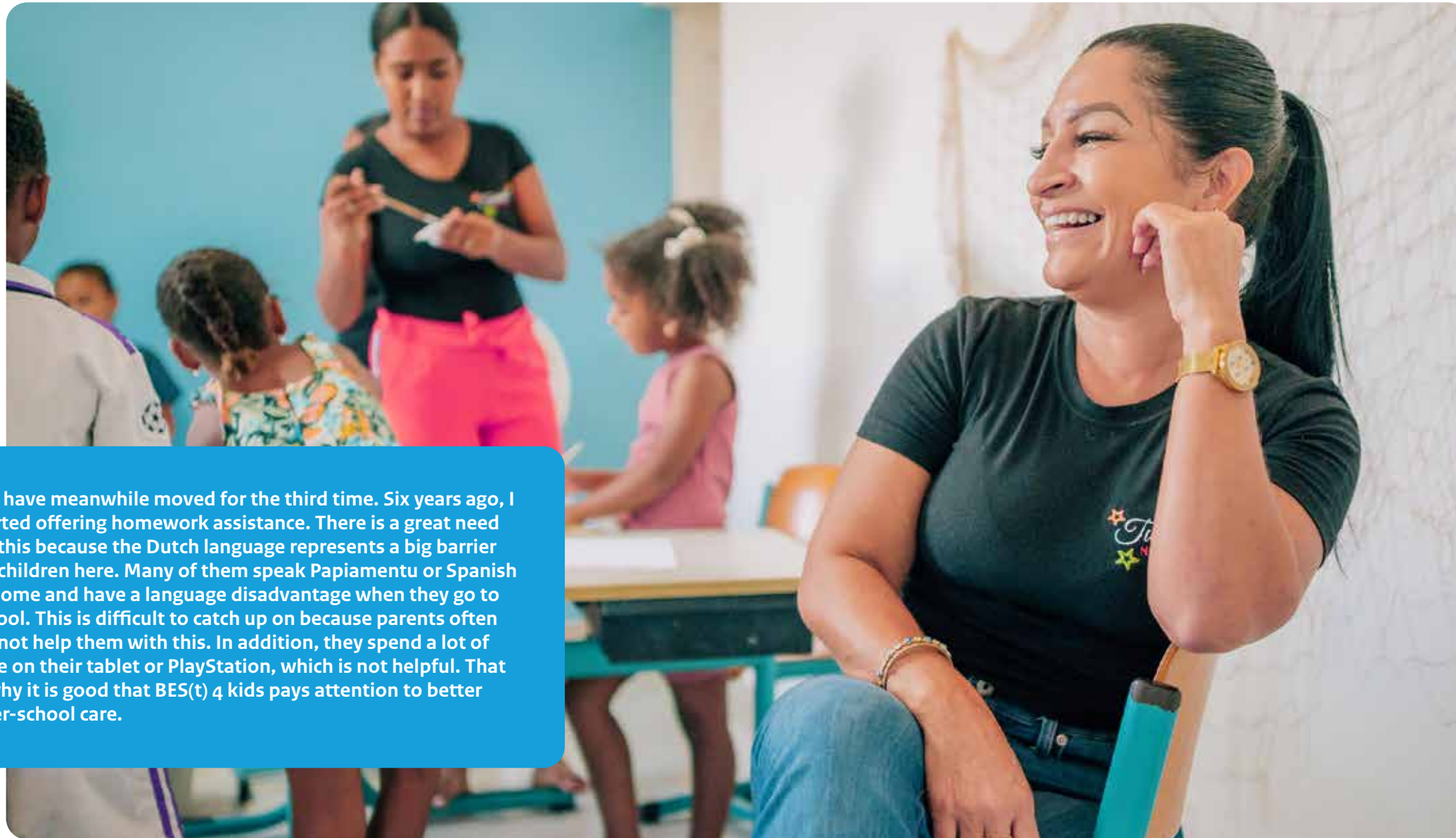
the quality committee. For me as a policy adviser, this shortens the lines of communication. We have better mutual contact, making cooperation easier and clearer. The span of control has thus improved.

The main challenges are our small size, shortage of housing and sufficient qualified staff. Together, we look for opportunities instead of thinking in terms of problems. For instance, we try to tackle the housing issue by lobbying.

We seek cooperation with other parties, e.g. Fundashon Cas Bonairiano or schools, for suitable housing.

What I am really proud of is that we have affordable childcare. And can ensure that quality is adhered to. That is an important milestone for Bonaire. We did not give up but persevered. I would like to see that we can use BES(t) 4 kids as a program model for the other challenges that our island is facing.”





“We have meanwhile moved for the third time. Six years ago, I started offering homework assistance. There is a great need for this because the Dutch language represents a big barrier for children here. Many of them speak Papiamentu or Spanish at home and have a language disadvantage when they go to school. This is difficult to catch up on because parents often cannot help them with this. In addition, they spend a lot of time on their tablet or PlayStation, which is not helpful. That is why it is good that BES(t) 4 kids pays attention to better after-school care.

I am satisfied with the program. Especially about the organization here on the island. The pedagogical staff are well trained or in the process of obtaining a diploma. People who work in childcare do have a VOG (certificate of good conduct) and a first aid diploma. The fire brigade checks the safety of buildings. And you can always turn to the project leaders if you have questions and need assistance. But I am also critical. Because the Netherlands pays, policy is determined from there. And that does not always suit the practical situation here on Bonaire.

Homework important

From my profession as a teacher, I see that homework assistance is important. Parents also indicate that they want their child to specifically be assisted with that. However, the program specifies that only one hour of homework can be completed in the after-school care. The other three hours are for other activities. We changed our daily routine. Besides homework, we do other things like crafts, walks, sports, playing in the park or dancing together. Of course this is nice for the children, but it does not allow them to finish their homework. And

Sjaika González

OWNER BSO TWINKEL



that causes problems at school. Besides, the organization of the activities costs money that we do not have.

Housing

A very significant part of our budget is spent on rent. Finding a suitable location is difficult. Often they are rental properties that need renovation. Then you invest money in the location and after a year the owner wants it back. You often do not get the investment back. The available space must also be large enough to accommodate enough children. Housing that is too small is therefore not profitable. The waiting list is consequently long. Many parents are seeking because they need to work. Life here is incredibly expensive. I would like to ask the government to help us with this problem. For example, by making land available to start building ourselves.

Stress

I also think it is a pity that some older people with a lot of experience are no longer allowed to work. Especially



since we are still facing a shortage of staff. The newcomers could still learn so many practical things from them. I understand the rules but sometimes they are incredibly rigid. It also causes me stress because the Dutch way is very tightly organized. On the one hand, I am expected to submit things like a VOG in a timely fashion. On the other hand, the subsidy arrives late every month. We always get the decision on the 1st day of the month. The money arrives in the account on the 10th or 13th day of the month. Meanwhile, you have to pay salaries, taxes, and rent. Money remains a problem. I know people are working on it through, for instance, a cost-price study, but it takes a long time to come up with solutions. In the meantime, it is sometimes quite shaky and you need to compromise.

Proud

Still, I am incredibly satisfied with the program. We have grown as organizations. Six years ago, for instance, we started with two and now there are five of us. I see that parents are satisfied with our work. The children like it here. We help the children, the children help each other. The other day, the school asked me to join as a teacher again. This is a dilemma for me. I am so proud of what I have achieved. My own after-school care facility, helping more and more children. I do what I do because I love children very much. Not everyone can work with children. You have to be able to listen and help. If necessary one-on-one. No child deserves a stamp that can never be removed. I want every child to be happy and joyful. It is rewarding work.”

“Finally, I have another idea; in the Netherlands, used materials of childcare organizations are regularly replaced by new ones. Perhaps these could be sent to the Caribbean Netherlands in a container once again. Then our children will also enjoy it.”



“Next year, childcare center Jiwiri will be celebrating its 40th anniversary and of course we want to celebrate that. It is a family business that started in 1984 as a playschool to take care of children in the mornings, mainly of working family members. Now, the 3rd generation is at the helm and we have grown to a childcare and after-school care for 80 children. The love for children is paramount in our family. From an early age, we have been assisting. A reason for the youngest director to study SPW 3 (educational social work level 3) and then HBO (higher professional education) in social work.

Change

The BES(t) 4 kids program gave us the financial resources to improve the quality of our care. Initially, the former director had a large range of duties. Not only taking care of children and supervising staff, but cooking, cleaning, and shopping were all part of it. We are now better organized. We rolled out the program step by step. It started with training our staff. Most of them were level 2 qualified. They were given the opportunity to take the level 3 training. Five of our staff currently attend school one day a week. This requires flexibility from us in the organization. We divide our groups so that there is at least one leader per group who is maximally qualified and at least meets the training level.

Pedagogical approach

Another change is the pedagogical approach. Five years ago, we did not do observations yet. There is now an observation form for all groups so that the leaders can keep track of developments in motor skills, language, and physical and mental growth for each child. They make their own monthly planning for the activities based on themes. A goal is set for each activity. The children come here not just to play but mainly to develop. Therefore, for example, we play games for fine motor skills, dance for movement, and sing together for speech and language development. We organize consultations with all parents twice a year. For daily communication about each child's development, we work with Kovnet. Parents can also see photos of the activities of their children



Esmeralda & Corina Pietersz

OWNERS JIWIRI

there and ask questions. We also hold parent meetings twice a year. Of course, there are daily chats while dropping off and picking up the children. It is nice that we also have contact with the schools. If necessary, you know from each other how a child is doing.

Entrepreneurship

We have been writing policies since the advent of the program but have also drawn up an evacuation plan, for example. And trainings and workshops are attended by staff. Because of BES(t) 4 kids, we have become more professional and safer. We learn a lot from the inspections. We are also definitely facing challenges. The main challenge is switching from coaching children towards entrepreneurship. You go into this profession to take care of children. This has brought about keeping an administration, preparing a staff planning, and organizing your business according to quality requirements. So

there is less time to be in front of a group yourself, but because of that you miss input. You cannot just sit in the office if you want to know what is going on in your organization. In addition, you must keep coaching the staff and keep a finger on the pulse. A lot has changed for them and it takes time to integrate this into the system. There is a lot involved in running a childcare center professionally. You have to find a balance.

Jiwiri

We are extremely proud of the way we are able to give love to our children. Parents are happy with the way we interact with their children and the information they receive. They see that reflected in the development of their child. The program also allowed us to improve the housing. We now have air-conditioning, outdoor space for the children to play on the playground equipment or cycle around with a safe fence around it. And we



are digital. We do fun activities with the children. Every Tuesday we take them to the town school with our bus to dance, for music lessons, cooking or crafts or to play theatre together. We organize

“We take road trips around the island and visit the kunuku to learn about the animals and the outdoors.”

happy hours, movie nights, and pyjama parties. We take road trips around the island and visit the kunuku to learn about the animals and the outdoors. Our name is Jiwiri, which is how we call the pigeon that is common on Bonaire. Our logo consists of a little doll and a little bird. We want to give the little bird everything it needs to go out into the world independently. Children are tomorrow's future.”



Mirjam Sewalt & daughter Misha

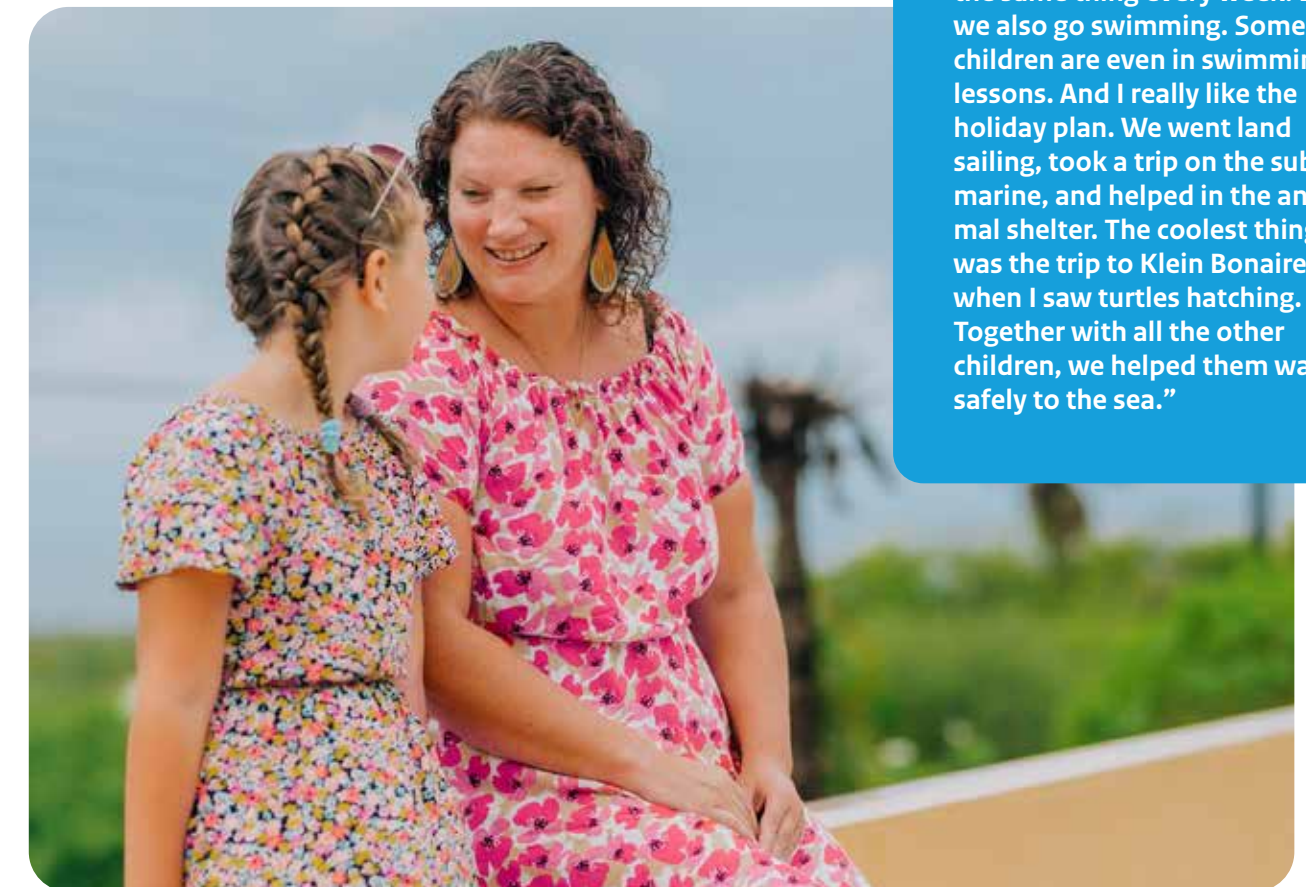
PARENT AND CHILD BSO BOKS



“My daughter Misha goes to Boks. I like that BSO. In recent years, I have noticed a huge professionalisation. Four years ago, there was hardly any communication. Parents are now much better involved. We

The professionalisation is partly due to the training program for the leaders. There is more structure and consultation. I see improvement in the organization. The communication with the parents

Misha (8 years old): I have lovely teachers who do fun things with us. Sometimes I find it a bit boring that we do the same thing every week. But we also go swimming. Some children are even in swimming lessons. And I really like the holiday plan. We went land sailing, took a trip on the submarine, and helped in the animal shelter. The coolest thing was the trip to Klein Bonaire, when I saw turtles hatching. Together with all the other children, we helped them walk safely to the sea.”



receive weekly schedules about the activities, feeding schedules for the children, and newsletters. There is also WhatsApp contact about, for instance, special outings or opening hours during holidays. At the end of the day, we always have a short conversation during the handover of my daughter. It is about what she did that day and whether there are any particularities. Once a year I am invited for a ten-minute parent meeting. And there is a parents’ committee.

“Four years ago, there was hardly any communication. Parents are now much better involved.”

on certain matters could still be better. For instance, Boks moved from Playa to Belnem without prior consultation with parents. I think that is unfortunate. It is good that the children are being fed healthier

food. There is more variety in the meals and they eat fruit and vegetables more often. Sometimes, my daughter even says it is too much. There is lunch after school, a hot meal in the afternoon, and a snack at the end of the day. But maybe these sumptuous meals are not a luxury for other children. I am satisfied with the care, but of course my daughter can tell more about that herself.”

Kiran Ogenia

PEDAGOGICAL EMPLOYEE
E SHOCO SABI

“I am grateful for the program . It gave me the opportunity to attend a pedagogical employee training. I am now doing what I love most, working with children. Not only is the training paid for, but we also receive extras like a bonus at Christmas that we can spend on our own families. The project leader is always there for us. She makes time to ask questions and solve practical things. The parents and children are happy. They greet me on the street and have a chat.

My work as a leader at E Shoco Sabí has changed positively. We now work with daily schedules at our BSO. We have five groups, each with two leaders. Together, we create a weekly teacher plan for each group. Previously, only homework was done. Now there is also time for educational games and playing outside together or dancing. During the reading quarter, the children themselves choose a book from our mini-library. Sometimes we read together, on the occasion they read independently or transcribe a text.

The children have more opportunities to develop in this way. It is also nice that the children are eating healthier. We cook hot food with vegetables and eat fruit as a snack. The nice thing is that we do the preparations together with the children. For example, we teach them to make healthy smoothies.

Sometimes the variety of activities is still a challenge. The primary school gives a lot of homework, so the children do not always manage to complete it. And personally, I would like it if there also is a possibility to study online. It is easier to combine that when you have a family. With BES(t) 4 kids, good steps were taken for childcare on Bonaire. The new working method provides children with better opportunities. And that is what we do it for.”



“In the European Netherlands, due to increasingly stringent requirements, we have been working on the improvement of the quality of childcare for some time. We now have a lot of experience in pedagogical policy development, coaching, safety, and health. There are also requirements for Bonaire to improve the quality. We see our strength in supporting childcare organizations there. For instance, during our visit in the spring, we gave workshops on making policy plans and risk inventories. Knowledge was exchanged on applying learning methods in the form of play. Thanks in part to BES(t) 4 kids, all childcare providers and their team members were able to participate in the workshops.

We aim to strengthen each other. Both in terms of policy and in the practical day-to-day course of affairs. We would like to organize this locally in the future. The will to improve the quality is there. But there are still many challenges. Our intention is not to determine how things should be done, but mainly to support according to need. Incidentally, this is about interaction. We learn

from the organizations on Bonaire, for example, to think in a solution-oriented manner. Every day, for instance, the car park behind the church is set up as a playground. The car park is cordoned off for this purpose to create a safe play area for children. This requires solid preparation from staff every day. I find it admirable that with few resources a suitable offer for children is created. We could learn something from this in the Netherlands.

“We aim to strengthen each other. Both in terms of policy and in the practical day-to-day course of affairs.”

What I like about our cooperation is that all layers can participate, from director to employee. I believe in this way of working TOGETHER. It makes a difference. You create support by inspiring each other. It kindles the flame and, as a result, we can achieve so much more through the exchange.”



Samantha Del Prado

TWINNING PARTNER
CRESCAT



Donald Paula

CHAIRMAN LOCAL CONSULTATION
CHILDCARE BONAIRE

“With the advent of the BES(t) 4 kids program in 2018, five years ago, many questions arose from the childcare organizations to the OLB and the Central Government. At the time, the Commissioner indicated that if we wanted to participate in decision-making, we had to start giving input. So we started the Local Consultation Childcare Bonaire (LOKB, in Dutch), of which I am the chair. As a sounding board group, LOKB fulfils the bridging function between the childcare providers and the relevant government organizations.

I notice that childcare organizations find it difficult to criticise the program directly in consultations with the OLB and the Central Government. That is why our role is incredibly important. One example is the inclusion of the porches in the square metre policy. Initially, this space did not count, but it is now being investigated to do so for the

three islands. I think at least 75% of this should be included as available space for children. I also have a problem with the fact that in a few years we have to meet the quality requirements that took more than 50 years in the Netherlands. It is unrealistic and creates enormous pressure. Childcare organizations get stressed every time the Dutch Inspectorate of Education visits. There is fear of not being able to meet the strict requirements.

Recently, the cost-price survey was presented. The survey took two years and confirmed what we have been pointing out for years. There is too little financial support. The difference between the Netherlands and Bonaire is significant, while we have to meet the same quality requirements. Moreover, I suspect that the childcare organizations have not sufficiently indicated their financial problems. They are afraid of losing subsidies if they speak up.

Therefore, I cannot fully agree with the report. Due to the instability in the number of children cared for annually, there is no stable income. The childcare providers depend on the subsidies they receive per child. Fewer children mean less subsidy. The plan is now to increase the funding in stages. But money is needed now, otherwise you will just keep putting out fires without building. I see people working day and night because of all the regulations that were added. Out of love for children and a sense of social responsibility. They do not want to abandon parents who have to work full-time and feel responsible for the income of their staff.

Another major challenge is represented by the educational requirements. While there are more people studying pedagogy now, the quality of the education leaves much to be desired. Things are constantly being changed in the curriculum. Students do not know where they stand, and the salary does not really make it attractive to work in childcare either. For example, the number of workable hours in after-school care is limited so you cannot earn a full-time salary. So most have to look for a second part-time job. There are almost none available on this island. The worry and stress about income should not be there. It does not benefit the quality of the work.

So there are still a lot of things that need to change, but that is why we are and will remain in discussions with the official authorities. Those consultations are good and I hope that by working well together we can improve the situation for everyone. My greatest wish is that pedagogical staff enjoy their work and get paid what they deserve. Then you get people who can do their jobs well. They represent the foundation of the future of our children.”



“Sentro Akseso Boneiru is the organization for care and social assistance on Bonaire. One of its departments is the childcare quality care team. I am its project coordinator. Our

Emily Kocks

PROJECT COORDINATOR
CHILDCARE, AKSESO



team consists of five pedagogical coaches and an orthopedagogue. We work closely with BES(t) 4 kids. In the beginning, we started with an inventory of the need and necessity of support for the childcare organizations. Not only in the field of business management but mainly in terms of training and expertise enhancement for the pedagogical employees.

On Bonaire, many childcare organizations were housed in residential houses of which the equipment and

furniture were not always suitable. Also, there was often no suitable play and game material and leaders were insufficiently trained. This had to change, which is why the Island Ordinance was tightened five years ago in association with the BES(t) 4 kids program. A lot of requirements were added. Our pedagogical coaches offer childcare organizations support in meeting the new regulations. By drawing up an action plan together with them for the points of improvement following the inspection report and the observations made by the pedagogical coaches. They also provide advice on the development of pedagogical policy plans and their implementation.

In 2021, a pilot was launched in cooperation with our orthopedagogue to care for children with special support needs. In five childcare organizations, a plus group was set up in the regular groups. The focus was on children with autism. The aim is to strengthen the pedagogical employees. The groups are smaller and receive extra support. For parents, this is an important pilot because no attention was ever paid to these groups of children before. Coming together during parent meetings ensures a pleasant exchange. At the moment, there are still three groups. We are working with the EOZ to better secure this inclusive form of childcare.

Together with all the organizations involved, our team is working hard for our little ones. But let us not forget that there is still a lot that is new, which takes time.”

“The groups are smaller and receive extra support. For parents, this is an important pilot because no attention was ever paid to these groups of children before”

Jantine Homan

POLICY OFFICER VWS

“To enable inclusive childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands, we developed a structure for care and support within the BES(t) 4 kids program, which is embedded in the legislative proposal. This took time and research. Parallel to the policy development, a pilot was started on each island. What we gathered from the pilot, we incorporated into the policy again. Practice and policy therefore ran side by side, which worked well.

Pilot

The Public Entity Bonaire prepared the pilot carefully. First, the preconditions were mapped out, it was clarified which groups of children they wanted to focus on and it was investigated which childcare organizations were willing and able to participate. Due to the scale of the island, local organizations are small. It is impossible for childcare organizations

“The care structure also offers the possibility of accommodating children who need more support than can be provided in a regular group. We call this ‘plus care’.”

to have all the knowledge and expertise in-house. The great thing was that childcare pedagogical coaches had already been active on Bonaire, at Sentro Akseso. Their involvement was further strengthened in the pilot and this has now also become the so-called ‘first line’ of the childcare care structure. By strengthening the team of pedagogical coaches, we ensure that all childcare organizations can call on pedagogical support in a low-threshold manner. For example, if they need advice or suspect that a child needs extra support.

Plus care

The care structure also offers the possibility of accommodating children who need more support than can be provided in a regular group. We call this ‘plus care’. In the pilot projects, we see that these children can also be accommodated by, for example, adapting the size of the group or the layout and the materials of a location. The Expertise Center for Educational Care (EOZ) is involved with the children who go to plus care. This also allows the support in childcare and education to be better aligned. Exactly what this cooperation will look like is still being elaborated.



Challenges

Providing adequate care for all children remains a challenge. Childcare organizations have their hands full with, for example, the recruitment and retention of sufficiently trained staff and suitable housing. Therefore, the rules for plus care on Bonaire will not take effect immediately. But that does not mean that nothing will happen. The Public Entity will continue the pilots for plus care, so that there is also a place for these children in childcare.

When I look at where we are now, and at the care structure we have built together, I am proud. It is extremely important that children who need extra support can also go to care where their brothers, sisters and friends are. I am happy that I was able to contribute to this on behalf of the Ministry of VWS.”

Rieket van den Dolder

INSPECTOR AT INSPECTORATE OF EDUCATION

“The ministries and Public Entities on the islands have asked the Inspectorate of Education to ensure that the common goal of improving the quality of childcare is achieved. We have been performing this supervisory role for education on the islands since 2010. From 2020, because of our independence and expertise, we have also been doing this for childcare. In this regard, we cooperate with local inspectors. In 2021, we started the first measurement of the quality of childcare for daycare, out-of-school care, and host parent care. In this respect, the Island Ordinance is our guide. As inspectorate, we participate in the BES(t) 4 kids project leaders’ meeting and contribute ideas to the program. We are positive about the commitment of both the ministries and the islands and have good contacts with the project leaders. After the first measurement, we found that there is great commitment and involvement from all involved, but that the basic quality of childcare was not yet in order. In September 2023, the second measurement was completed. In early 2024, we will be able to indicate where we stand. We do already see that expertise has increased and the goals childcare wants to achieve are clearer.

Cooperating on quality

We monitor four quality areas. The local inspectorate is responsible for supervising the administration, staff, and housing. Health and safety supervision is also part of their duties. We supervise the quality of the implementation in the groups and the quality assurance. One difference is that the local inspectorate visits childcare organizations unannounced. We always visit announced, where we look at the offer for the children, the pedagogical education of the pedagogical employees, and quality care, among other things. When we are on the islands, the local inspectorate and the Inspectorate of Education interact intensively. We also have regular online contact with the local inspectors. In case of contingencies, we naturally know how to find each other sooner.

Challenges

The biggest challenge on the islands is housing. A lot of childcare takes place

in rented accommodation. It is proliferating with space. Another challenge is represented by the certificates of good conduct. We stress the importance of them to the organizations. A varied offer for the children is also a point of attention. BES(t) 4 kids is currently developing a program that better suits Bonaire. We expect a lot from that. Another point of attention is the development of an observation tool to monitor the development of children. So that a pedagogical employee can make adjustments when they notice that a child lags behind in development or can handle more. Continuously improving quality and constantly evaluating and adjusting goals is also a challenge. In this respect, BES(t) 4 kids is immensely helpful by offering workshops, training opportunities, and twinning (cooperation with childcare

centers in the European Netherlands). The pedagogical coaches also contribute to improvement.

What can be improved

Inspection visits are always exciting, but we are well received. We do our best to engage in a good relationship with the locations and make quality discussable. Not wanting to do everything at once. Step by step works better and we discuss with the provider what the next step for improvement may be. We have good relationships with the childcare organizations. We are clear in our assessment and in the report and in joint meetings we explain what our supervision entails and what we expect from the childcare. We see that steps are being taken and that it is becoming increasingly clear how and why improvements are needed. We are not there yet, there



are differences between locations. The improvement of the quality aspects of health and safety must be faster. There is more time for the improvement of educational activities and quality care. As Inspectorate we are committed to the improvement of the continuous line for children between childcare and education on the islands.

We do it together

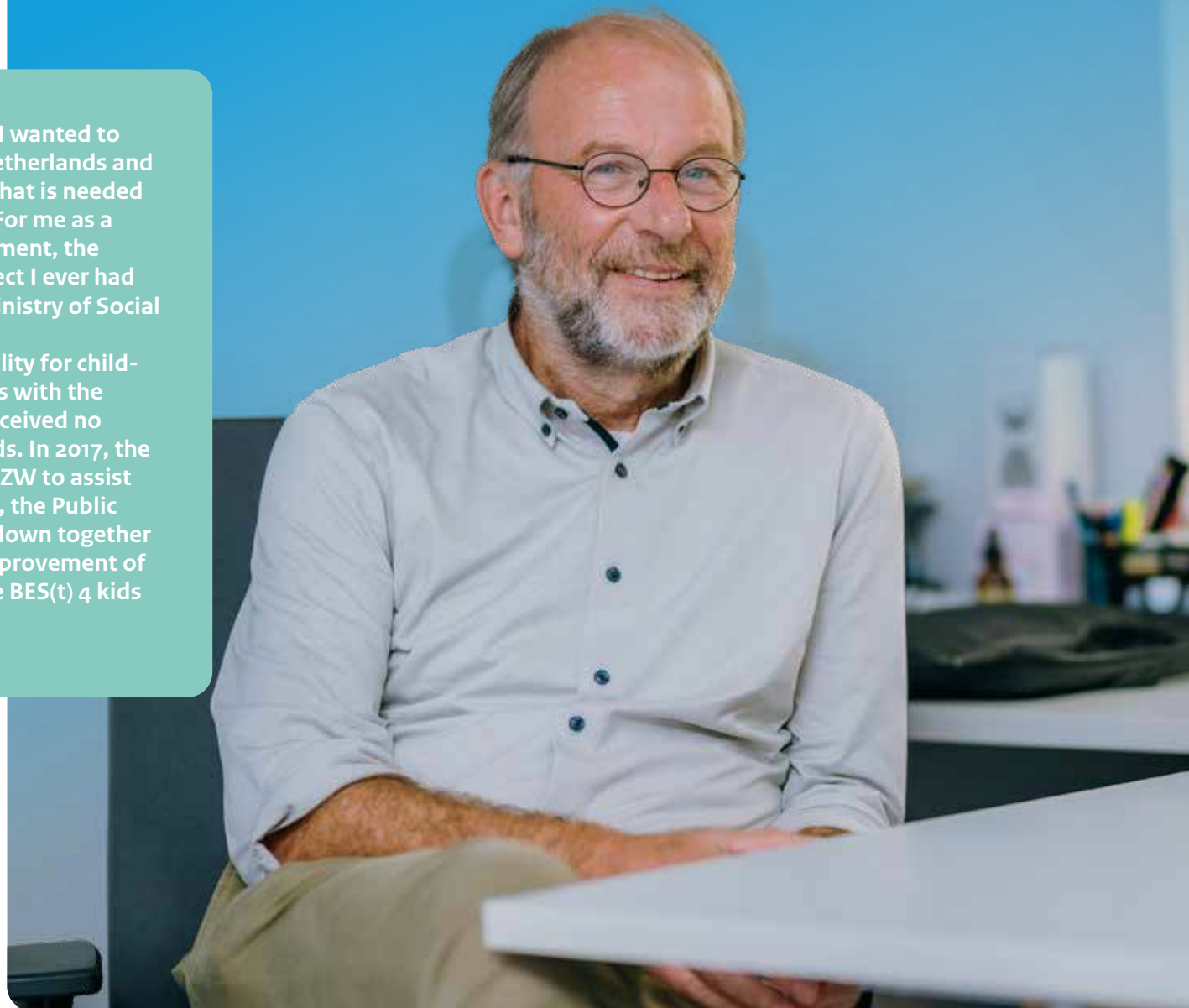
In the meantime we have learned that we will only succeed in improving the quality of childcare on the islands through a joint approach. This can be done by connecting to what each location needs and providing tailor-made solutions. In this regard, it is important to organize learning from each other and to discuss step by step what needs

“We do our best to engage in a good relationship with the locations and make quality discussable. Not wanting to do everything at once. Step by step works better and we discuss with the provider what the next step for improvement may be.”

to be done. We work together on the improvement of the quality of childcare so that children will have more opportunities.”



“In 2018, I was asked by my director if I wanted to work on childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands and work with the Public Entities to see what is needed to be done. I am glad I said yes then. For me as a Project Leader for the Central Government, the BES(t) 4 kids program is the best project I ever had the opportunity to work on for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. From October 10, 2010, the responsibility for childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands lays with the islands themselves. They therefore received no money from the European Netherlands. In 2017, the Public Entities asked the Ministry of SZW to assist in improving childcare. Five years ago, the Public Entities and Central Government sat down together to come up with a program for the improvement of childcare. This led to the launch of the BES(t) 4 kids program.



ducted cost surveys over several years. Recently, the latest cost price study has been completed. We see that in 2022, costs indeed exceed revenues at a number of childcare organizations. The report confirms the picture that subsidies and other contributions are not enough for a large number of organizations. It is too easy to say that costs should

continue to invest in that. That is why it would be good if childcare organizations and employees would jointly agree on salaries and get involved in the preparation of a CLA in order that people want to work and keep working in childcare. The government will also make this possible financially by taking this into account in the level of

“One of the major challenges is and remains qualified staff and good entrepreneurship. We must continue to invest in that.”

then just be reduced. Well-paid staff and groups that are not too large are very important to stimulate the development of children. It often cannot be solved with fewer staff. The problem is also more complex. For instance, we work with the four-eyes principle so there are always two pedagogical employees in a group, even if the groups are small. Or the housing is not big enough to accommodate more children. It is important to strike a good balance between the amount of compensation from the government and the own responsibility of the childcare organizations. It is ultimately the Minister who will decide.

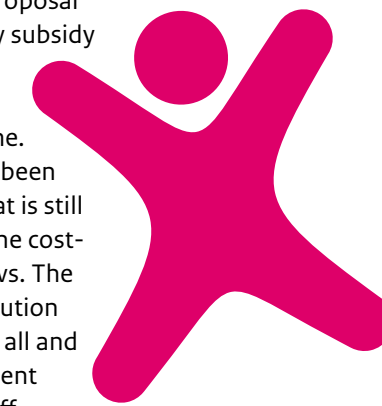
the subsidy. Housing is another challenge. There, the responsibility lies primarily with the organizations themselves. We are talking with local authorities and the organizations to see how we can support them in this regard.

Challenges

One of the major challenges is and remains qualified staff and good entrepreneurship. We must

Improvement

Looking at where we were five years ago and where we are now, I can say that together we have made a huge improvement. There is a legislative proposal and a temporary subsidy scheme as a precursor to a structural scheme. The subsidy has been doubled, but that is still not enough as the cost-price study shows. The parental contribution was reduced for all and a major investment was made in staff training. The Inspectorate started and is holding up a mirror to us showing where we are and where we need to go. Each island has done so in its own way. We are working very hard and passionately and this is visible in the qualitative steps being taken. We are not there yet, but realise that we are only five years in. And we must learn to accept that sometimes things cannot be done differently / faster. Above all, let's have the patience together to grow to the level we envision for BES(t) 4 kids.”



Mission and vision

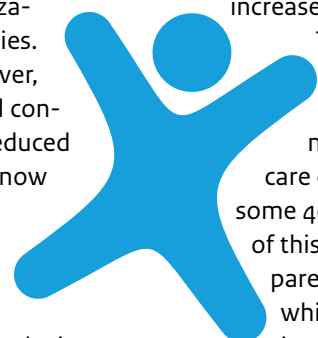
Improving quality cannot be done without money. That is one of the first things that needed to be sorted out. Thus, at the first joint conference in 2018, the first question from the islands was: is money available? Without money, we cannot do anything. Fortunately, that money was there and, under the guidance of an external program manager, the BES(t) 4 kids program could start. By answering the questions together: what are the vision and mission? What do we need to do and how do we organize it? Who bears what responsibility? What financial resources do we need for this? That was the basis for the plan of action.

Affordable childcare

Both the Central Government and the Public Entities took a project-based approach. Money was available from the Central Government to start a project on each island. We worked along three lines: affordable childcare for all, the improvement of quality, and the tightening of the supervision. Within these, we worked out the details. One of the main goals was to make childcare affordable.

Rob Janssen
PROJECT LEADER BES(t) 4 KIDS
MINISTRY OF SZW

Therefore, a temporary subsidy scheme was established in 2020, so that childcare organizations received subsidies. One condition, however, was that the parental contribution would be reduced and capped. Parents now pay much less. As a result, childcare organizations were no longer able to absorb increased costs by increasing the parental contribution. Recently, the level of subsidies has



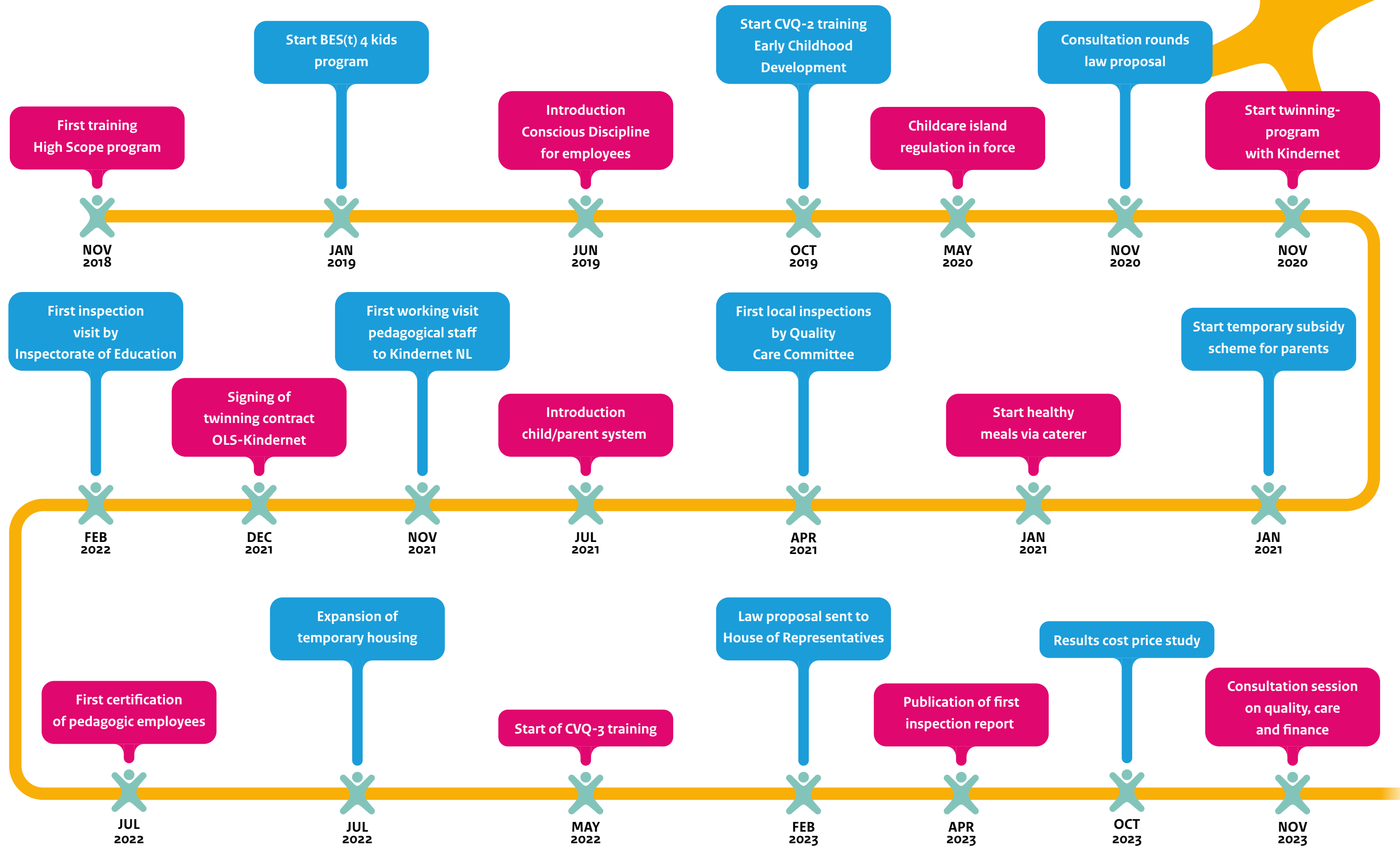
occupied minds despite the fact that subsidies have regularly been increased in the recent period. There is also a childcare place subsidy, meant for parents who really cannot afford to pay for the care of their child. Currently, some 400 parents make use of this. We suspect that more parents are eligible for this, which is why we are launching a relevant investigation. After all, childcare should be available to everyone.

Cost-price survey

From the beginning, there were concerns that the subsidies were not enough to absorb the costs. To understand the actual costs of childcare organizations, we con-



Milestones Saba



Esther van Woudenberg

PROJECT LEADER
BES(t) 4 KIDS SABA

“In May of this year, I took over the role of BES(t) 4 kids Saba project leader from Rosalyn Johnson. Before that, I worked as a policy maker, management consultant and childcare project leader, among other things. I have now been living on the island for nine years and I am familiar with the people and culture. In recent years, there have been many positive changes at childcare organizations. Unfortunately, when my children were young, this was not the case. There was little communication and little attention to their development. The arrival of the program meant a tremendous improvement which was more than welcome.

Training

One of the biggest changes is the qualification of childcare staff. Almost every pedagogical worker is now trained to level 2. For this we temporarily offered a special local high school program. At the moment we have enough qualified staff so the education program is about to end. Within our small community there are too few applications to continue this kind of education. Some staff are now being trained at level 3 in cooperation with NIPA on St. Maarten. We also certify staff based on their experience through the EVC route. It is not yet possible to study at level 4, but a higher level is not the only way to take steps forward. For instance, there is a number of pedagogical staff with a natural talent for children with special needs. Trainings and workshops on specific topics could give them more benefit. This will

allow us to use knowledge and experience gained in combination with training even more effectively and efficiently.

Twinning

We owe other positive developments to the twinning program that we were able to successfully complete after two years. Pedagogical



staff got the chance to look around in Dutch childcare for a while and people from there visited us. This broadened their view. Here, for example, children did not play outside as much because their clothes get dirty. However, children learn by playing and discovering outside. People understand that better now, partly because of the twinning

program. Another example is after-school care. Children should be given space after school to play and romp around. The BSO is not meant to be an extension of school with the main focus on homework support.

Collaboration

We enjoy working with the other islands. That way we don't all have to reinvent the wheel ourselves.



At the same time the differences do require a different approach. On Saba we only have one daycare center and we have two after-school centers. That is easy to communicate, the lines are short. For us, the challenge lies in other matters such as the translation of the

4 kids directly on the childcare organizations. We solved the housing problem for the daycare center by temporarily providing 18 containers. These prefabricated buildings are furnished according to the new quality requirements. We also contribute to activities for

“The next project is to build the new permanent childcare location. A great challenge that is sure to succeed through the commitment of the people on this island.”

legislation and policies drawn up in Dutch. The official language on this island is English. Another challenge is the lack of choice for childcare by parents. Consultation between the elementary school and childcare centers is improving in recent years. Some children are social-emotionally underdeveloped. It is important for both teachers and pedagogical employees to be adequately skilled in how to deal with this. Working together and sharing experience helps to increase knowledge.

Small is big

There are many advantages to our small scale. For instance, we have the ability to spend the money available through BES(t)

children and staff trainings. For children who need extra care, there is the Small Care Team. In it, the Expertise Center Education Care, the youth nurse and the childcare organizations work together. They meet once a month to ensure that the needs of these children are met.

Meanwhile, the daycare center on Saba meets the childcare requirements set by law and we are proud of that. This would have been impossible without the proactive role of everyone working in or for childcare. The next project is to build the new permanent childcare location. A great challenge that is sure to succeed through the commitment of the people on this island.”

Rosalyn Johnson

HEAD OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PUBLIC ENTITY SABA

“For the government of Saba, the BES(t) 4 kids program is a great opportunity to improve the quality of childcare. Due to the small scale of our island, we do not have the capacities and resources for this. We have therefore seized the program with both hands and made it a priority. It became part of our community development department. Within this department, we work together in the fields of social work, domestic violence, youth, education and culture according to the continuous learning line. We ensure the support and involvement of our partners, schools and childcare organizations.

Our pedagogical network meets twice a year. That seems little, but the island is so small that everyone knows each other. The lines of communication are incredibly short. We have one daycare center and, recently, two after-school childcare centers. We work with an education method for both childcare, after-school care and groups 1 and 2 of primary school. Together, the stakeholders chose the ‘High Scope’ method. With this method we stimulate the development of children aged 0 to 7 with specific attention to language development. For older children, we are working on implementing an appropriate program at the schools and after-school childcare centers.

Housing was the biggest challenge on the island. We overcame this problem with a prefab building



co-funded by BES(t) 4 kids. We have the ability on Saba to help the childcare organizations directly with money. One of the advantages of a small community. The disadvantage of being small is whether we can continue to have enough trained staff. The future will show us whether we can continue to recruit or train enough qualified pedagogical staff.

With some pride, I can mention that our daycare center has met the standards set by the inspectorate of education. That would have been impossible without support from BES(t) 4 kids.

“Together, the stakeholders chose the ‘High Scope’ method. With this method we stimulate the development of children aged 0 to 7 with specific attention to language development.”



My greatest recognition goes to both the pedagogical staff and the childcare organizations. By being willing to cooperate and, above all, taking the opportunity to improve themselves. Not being afraid, but receptive to criticism because this is what actually helps us. We have the positive vibe.”



“In 2014, I started working for the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland as a Social Worker for Youth and Family on Saba. When I became pregnant with my son in 2018, my request for part-time work was denied. However, I did not want to take my son to the childcare center because I had concerns regarding safe, adequate and quality care. So I resigned from my job to care for my son full time. However, the opportunity arose to take over the position of manager of Laura Linzey Childcare and I humbly took up that challenge. I felt that other parents may have had similar concerns and therefore, I wanted to contribute towards improving childcare on Saba, in terms of safety, adequacy, stimulation and quality care.

Housing is a challenge

In 2020, BES(t) 4 kids defined the quality of childcare in the island ordinance for the first time. From then on, there were standards to meet. At the time, there were two daycare centers. One of which stopped for this reason. As a result, we received even more applications. At that time, we were accommodating 35 children. There was a waiting list of another 20 children. As our accommodation was destroyed by the devastating hurricane Irma in 2017, we temporarily moved into the former governor's house which we rent from the RCN. On the porch, we built four additional rooms to reduce the waiting list. However, we ran out of space and could not meet the legal requirements. With help from the program, we found a solution to this problem. On the site, prefabricated buildings have been erected next to the governor's house that meet all standards. The intention is to build a permanent building on the island in the future. A challenge because it is incredibly difficult to buy land in a central location large enough to house so many children. It would be nice if we manage to do so before the program ends.

Tessa Alexander

MANAGER LAURA LINZEY CHILDCARE

Educating staff

Another challenge was training staff. Most of the staff did not have any CVQ-qualifications. We started CVQ level 2. Daily scheduling was a challenge, because people were now attending school two days a week. However, because of BES(t) 4 kids, staff were able to attend classes on the island and 95% of them successfully completed.

Some of them have even started MBO 3. There is some discussion that this level will be required in the future. That could become a big challenge. Our community is incredibly small and most employees have children of their own. The training is not offered on this island. It would be nice if at least CVQ 2 is given a permanent position in the curriculum of our high school.

In addition to training, we use a EVC pathway so that we can take work experience in childcare to qualify our staff. To complement basic training, the program provides additional training through the High-Scope and Conscious Discipline methods. The same methods are applied in elementary education, which ensures a flawless transition.

Progress

Through BES(t) 4 kids, conditions for pedagogical staff have improved. In appreciation but also in salary. Before, we had budget for ten staff members. We now

work with twenty-two. It is important to secure these funds in order to have enough places for children in the future and to offer appropriate quality. In addition, policies on pedagogy, health and safety, among others, have been written, and

“Just as important is that we can offer free diapers and hygiene wipes to parents. Many people here cannot afford that themselves.”

implemented. Policies are periodically revised by Management and Staff Policy Revision Committee. In this respect, the twinning program was a great experience. Back and forth, we visited each other to work and exchange experiences. Through coaching, training in collaboration and learning about interaction with children, we were able to make huge improvements. The only thing we are still missing is a local pedagogical coach. The big difference in quality between the Netherlands and Saba is no longer there. We are now working on a similar level. Not only in our work but also in the facilities we can offer. We also recently expanded to offer BSO services.

Parents and food

We use the Pro-care system (Digital Childcare Software) to inform parents daily about their child's development and activities. Meetings are held four times a year where we discuss policy, education and research with the parent's committee. We are committed to

healthy eating, more fruit and vegetables and vegetarian meals. These meals are catered by an outsourced cook. We have to be creative because fresh food is not available every day, as it is only delivered by boat once a week on Wednesdays. We

solve this by, for instance, offering a fruit snack at the end of the week and a smoothy at the beginning of the week. In the past the cook was also responsible for cleaning. That was way too much therefore we are happy that the program allows us to hire a cleaning company. Just as important is that we can offer free diapers and hygiene wipes to parents. Many people here cannot afford that themselves. And all toddlers are also offered a spoutless drinking cup- because this is much healthier for their teeth.

Our childcare would not be what it is today without BES(t) 4 kids.”

Sheyla Daniel Williams

PEDAGOGICAL WORKER
LAURA LINZEY CHILDCARE

“I love BES(t) 4 kids. The program does a lot for children on Saba. Not just care but especially in their development. In my work as a pedagogical employee, I am facilitated by education and training. Implementing this in the child daycare center has improved childcare tremendously. And that was needed. We made some big steps. Before I started working in childcare, I was a stay-at-home mother. When the children were old enough, I thought it was time for professional personal growth by taking advantage of my opportunities. That is the reason I applied for the pedagogical assistant vacancy at Laura Linzey Childcare at the time.

The program gave me the opportunity to study CVQ 2 alongside my job in childcare. I have also started MBO 3. I take every chance to professionalize and grow. From the twinning program, I learned a lot about pedagogy. On this island, we mainly have a lot of physical interaction with children.



In the Netherlands, I learned the importance of mental-emotional support. The children there are

much more independent. They learn this early on; they are less afraid to explore on their own. They play interactively instead of playing independently side by side as you see here. I also see it as a job to educate parents in this. Let your child explore, get dirty outside, do things themselves.

That means more of us need to commit to educating parents to help children grow towards independence. Starting at young age with the right guidance leads to responsible adults. This makes you valuable for society and that is important for this island. Helping to develop conscious young people who can make their own choices in dealing with the world around us. Today's youth is the future.”

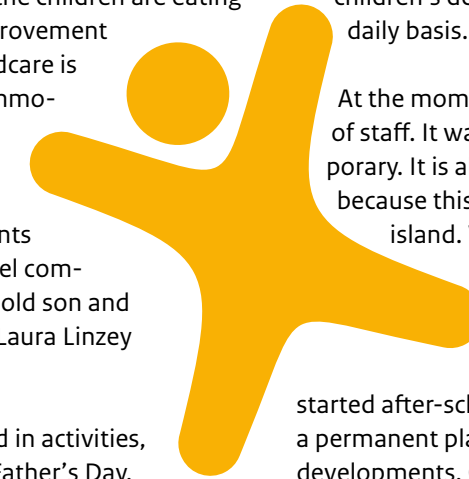


“We are happy with the program. Most of the teachers are qualified now and a lot of effort is being put into professionalization. There is routine in the groups and the children are eating healthy. This is a huge improvement from a few years ago. Childcare is now up to date. The accommodation is safe both inside and outside and we see a different approach to the children. Their developments are monitored daily. We feel comfortable taking our 3-year-old son and 6-month-old daughter to Laura Linzey Childcare.

As parents, we are involved in activities, like on Mother's Day and Father's Day. There is also a sports event to which we are invited every year. We participate in the

parent's association to provide our input. We meet four times a year. By working with the Pro Care system, we are kept informed about our children's developments and activities on a daily basis.

At the moment, there is sometimes a shortage of staff. It was explained to us that this is temporary. It is all about keeping things in balance because this is the only daycare center on the island. We hope that eventually, with the help of BES(t) 4 kids, the prefab buildings can be replaced by permanent housing. And we welcome the fact that they started after-school care. The children will have a permanent place until the age of 12. All positive developments. Our son gets the opportunity to play with other children. And our daughter, she sleeps and eats. They are kind to her.”



Familie Nero-Meeuwesen

PARENTS LAURA LINZEY CHILDCARE



“My grandmother Carmen Simmon started the first childcare center on Saba in 1962. After that, my mother Elka Charles-Simmons took over her role alongside her work as a teacher. I am now the director of Saba Girls and Boys Sport Society. It is fair to say that the love for children is in our blood. From taking care of children, we grew into an after-school center where we supervised children doing their homework and prepare them for any insource and outsource activities. This was mainly due to the demands from parents. Back then, children were given a lot of homework to do, and parents lacked the expertise and time to help with it. Meanwhile, with the arrival of a new director the policy at school has been positively adjusted. Children have much more time to play, and minimal focus is given to homework but more focus on learning through play.

Development of children

The BES(t) 4 kids program changed quite a bit. The focus shifted to children’s development. So not just learning by doing homework after school, but by discovering the world through play. This required staff to be adequately trained. With the help of the program, our staff was able to undergo pedagogical training at level 2. A number of them are now training at level 3. They have learned to interact with children in a different way. Pedagogical development plans are also made for each child. We work with an activity calendar and a daily schedule. This makes organizing and communicating with parents easier. We have a staff WhatsApp group with daily updates, and we talk to parents via Pro Care about their child’s development both one-on-one and by organizing joint parent meetings.



Ludwina Charles

DIRECTOR SABA GIRLS AND BOYS SPORT SOCIETY

Affordable daycare

A nice bonus of the program is the reduction of the parental contribution. This was much needed, as poverty is high on this island. Especially for single mothers. Almost all parents work full-time because the minimum wage is too little to live on. In the past, there was regularly not enough money to pay for childcare. Even though we worked with minimal resources, we never refused a child. Children were always welcome to continue coming to our program. Fortunately, that situation has now improved. We have more resources available such as play materials. With money from the program, we were able to update the accommodation and the rent is paid.

“In the past, there was regularly not enough money to pay for childcare. Even though we worked with minimal resources, we never refused a child”

We make sure the children get healthy meals and snacks. This does remain a challenge because we don’t always have access to fresh food. This sometimes makes it difficult to meet the quality rules of the program.

Pros and cons

BES(t) 4 kids has its advantages and disadvantages. The quality of childcare has gone up and most staff are now pedagogically qualified. The rules are not always easy to apply for various reasons. The same policy applies to the three islands, even though we differ greatly culturally, in terms of surface area and number of inhabitants. As the smallest island, we face different challenges than, say, Bonaire. For instance, many people here have dual roles simply because there are not enough people to fill all positions. It can be difficult to maintain integrity. Life on Saba is terribly expensive and salaries comparatively

incredibly low. Simple things like shoes you can’t just buy here. Everything comes by boat once a week or has to be ordered online. And qualified staff are hard to come by.

Keep on going

Overall, there is progress, but it comes with challenges. We are doing our best to adapt. For

instance, we have slightly stretched the maximum age limit for after-school care. Officially, we accommodate children from 4 to 12 years old. But there are children whose parents feel they are not yet ready for the next step. Such as children with special needs or who have to stay in school a year longer. We were there for children, we still are, and we will continue to be.”



“Being a part of BES(t)4 kids program afforded me the opportunity to study Early Childhood Development and the Social Pedagogical Worker Qualifications. Through these initiatives I was able to develop and practice the skills obtained during my training. In my reflection I learned to investigate, analyze and utilize effective psychological support to the children in my care. The peer review and cognitive coaching aided by forcing me to look/reflect inward and restructure my own behaviors and thought systems. In doing so I am better able to adjust when reflecting, but also set new goals that I can work towards, which further allow me to grow as a childcare provider and more importantly a person.



Moeisha Cane

PEDAGOGICAL EMPLOYEE SABA GIRLS AND BOYS SPORT SOCIETY

In 2021 I was a part of a twinning program which gave me the opportunity to work at a childcare institution in the Netherlands. It was helpful to learn and share experiences. I noticed the varying differences that our children share with those of the Netherlands, however I took and utilized those differences and adapted them to suit our children and their specific needs. The way in which the system

is set-up the children here attend ASC five days a week, due to both their parents having full-time jobs. At the ASC we support the children in their development in all facets, which can at certain points may also involve parenting. When asked about my challenges, I will

have to say keeping kids engaged at times when their behavior can be challenging, however we always end-up finding a positive way to resolve the situation on hand at that time. It is always nicer when more funding is made available, this enables everyone to perform their jobs more efficiently. Work is currently underway on a collective labor agreement. Obviously, that will help us even more in improving childcare. I think it goes without saying how generous of a help that would be for us. In conclusion I would like to say that at any workplace you are faced with challenges and set-backs, nevertheless I see the developments positively. We have grown as a team; our communication has improved tremendously. Through this happy, harmonious working environment we can better guide the children in our care as they become the next generation of respectful, responsible, happy adults.”



June Every

PARENT SABA GIRLS AND BOYS SPORT SOCIETY

“My son Jayden has been happily attending after-school-care for about 7.5 years. He has down syndrome. As a result, he needed more time to transition from the child daycare center to Sacred Heart School, once he started at SHS he then started attending the after-school-care. Jayden is incredibly social and gets along with everyone. As he has no siblings, it is wonderful for him to be able to play with other children. The childcare center is a nice safe environment for him. They are always waiting for him to arrive.

I am incredibly grateful for the care he receives at the center. I wouldn't be able to go to work without it. When picking him up, if needed, they report back to me how things went. We talk about his development and social interaction. A lot has changed with the arrival of BES(t) 4

“Jayden turns 12 soon, which is a bit of a concern for me, although there are other programs on the island, something is lacking for children with special needs.”



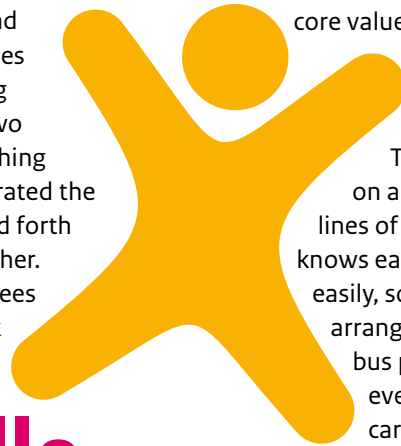
kids. There are more activities for the children. This was limited before because there was not enough funding. Jayden is involved in all the activities organized for the children. His speech is limited but has improved. The changed pedagogical approach has helped him in his overall development.

It is nice that after-school care is more affordable nowadays. I would ask BES(t) 4 kids for more customization, though. Officially, children are allowed to attend the after-school program until the age of 12. Jayden turns 12 soon, which is a bit of a concern for me, although there are other programs on the island, something is lacking for children with special needs. I hope eventually (sooner than later) there will be more opportunities for children with special needs who need extra care while parents are working. ▶



“Kindernet is an organization with 25 childcare locations in Deventer and Gelderland, more than 200 employees and over 700 families. Due to the increasingly strict requirements in the Netherlands, we have a lot of experience in improving quality. Moreover, our scale gives us a lot of clout. We wanted to share our experiences and we were also very curious about what Twinning would bring us. In the first year we could only have online contact because of the pandemic. What started

with digital consultations on standards and protocols grew into having great face-to-face conversations. In the second year, two colleagues went on a working visit to Saba for two months. The coaching ‘on the job’ accelerated the program. Back and forth we visited each other. Groups of employees came to see, work



at our locations and attend training sessions. We met with the managers to establish a vision and mission, naming core values. Now we are many steps and inspiration sessions ahead.

The advantage of working on a small island is the short lines of communication. Everyone knows each other and that connects easily, so some things can be arranged quickly. For instance, a bus picks up all the children every day to take them to day care. The downside is that the small scale makes the market function relatively poor and everything has to be imported from outside, for instance when buying materials. But also training or internships can only be found outside Saba. Despite everyone’s enthusiasm, that limits the possibilities.

The cooperation was very valuable for both sides: we learned a lot from the colleagues on Saba and it was a cultural enrichment. At the same time, we realized more than before that we do have it incredibly well in the Netherlands. We have become even more aware of how we do things. We are looking more sharply at our own vision, mission and implementation of policy at the locations.

It is fantastic, that we were able to inspire our colleagues on the other side of the ocean. They have come to realize that they have their own control and (girl)power. Some things were not a given like in the Netherlands. Transfer conversations now take place, children play outside more and it is easier to give each other feedback. No longer working as a babysitter, but as a professional. Taking the initiative yourself to comply with laws and regulations despite the challenges. This is how we allow each other to grow and learn from our collaboration. The slogan of Tessa Alexander (manager Laura Linzey Childcare Center) “we are bad girls doing good things” we have fulfilled together.”

Herma Machiavello & Selma Ozkan

TWINNING PARTNER KINDERNET



Tedisha Gordon

LOCAL INSPECTOR

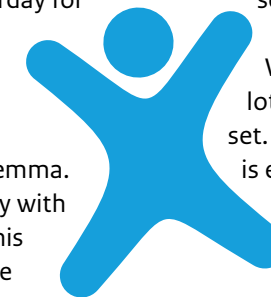


“Being a local inspector, I look at five standards within childcare centers: registration and administration, Staff and groups, Accommodation, Health and safety and Pedagogical climate. The local inspection is actually always received positively by the childcare centers. This is mainly due to the good mutual relationships. Even when I drop by unexpectedly, like for example yesterday for the inspection of The Laura Linzey Daycare, they were very welcoming and very open to me beginning my inspection. The standards for healthy food sometimes create a dilemma. Childcare centers are asked to comply with RIVM guidelines for healthy foods, this guideline is not always very reachable for Saba given the context of where we live and how attainable certain foods are, we therefore get input from The Public Health Department for this.

There is a short line with the inspectors of education in the Netherlands. Therefore it is easy to consult and ask questions if and when they arise. An area where some improvement is needed, is meeting more often to align and provide input from the islands as customization is sometimes

necessary. On Saba, for instance, it is sometimes difficult to give enough space to every child as stipulated. It would also be nice to rotate among ourselves as inspectors within the three islands of the Caribbean Netherlands. By watching someone else’s work, you broaden your own field of vision. It would help us continue to meet the standards set by BES(t) 4 kids.

With the advent of the program, I see a lot of improvement, the standard has been set. The child daycare centers know what is expected of them. They do their best to keep improving. One example is the progress in the pedagogical approach. Two years ago, the approach to children was mainly directive. I now see in the centers that staff talk to children at eye level. Instead of putting children in front of the TV, they play. A huge asset are the small care team consultations. Their main aim is better opportunities for children who need extra care by taking action on time. There is more structure, better mutual communication and positive pedagogical development. Partly due to inspection, quality continues to improve. It helps us to stay on top of things.”



“Three years ago I started on Saba as a youth nurse. I have a wide range of duties within Public Health and the preventive care of all children from 0 to 12 years old. Parents visit me at the consultation office regarding their child’s development and health. There I interact with them and I’m there for questions and to provide information and tips. At the elementary school, I see all children in grades 2 to 7 for both physical examination and their social development. We also offer all vaccinations according to the National Vaccination Program. For some time now, I have been making home visits to families where an infant has been born and needs additional support. In addition to these basic tasks, I work with the childcare organization, after-school programs, the small care team and the schools.



Small Care team

When I started my job, there was a bi-weekly Small Care team consultation with Public Health, EC2 and the daycare center for children aged 3 to 4. The goal was to improve the transition of children to elementary school and provide additional parenting support where needed. We now do this for ages 0 to 4. This allows us to help parents and children much earlier with a smooth transition from daycare to school. If the problems are complex, we make a plan of action. Six months ago, childcare organizations themselves started to write these plans. We give advice and help with the evaluation. Parents are always involved in this process.

Big difference

With the introduction of the BES(t) 4 kids program, I see a huge differ-

ence compared to a few years ago. Where childcare used to be a kind of babysitting function, I see that a lot has changed in the way children are treated. There is more attention for the children and they are working on stimulating their development. They have also started tracking children’s development as part of the High Scope method. This means that the children are looked at more closely and extra support is picked up earlier if necessary. However, communication still needs to be worked on. There is too much talking over children’s heads instead of telling them what you are going to do. Explaining why and listening are still often forgotten. I try to set a good example by being consistent and keeping my appointments. I ask parents and childcare providers if I can explain something instead of advising what to do. I like to empower them so we can build together. I’ve noticed that more and more parents and also childcare can find the consultation center for questions. We have come to understand each other and I am proud of that.” ▶

Jenneke van Bussel

PUBLIC HEALTH YOUTH NURSE



Annelies Buurmeijer

DIRECTOR EXPERTISE CENTER FOR EDUCATION AND CARE

“Initially, the education and care expertise center on Saba was there for the schools. A few years ago the childcare organizations joined it. We work with a small care team for children with special needs. Once every three or four weeks we meet with the childcare organizations and the youth nurse to discuss extra care for those children. With the daycare center we are focused at the moment mainly on preparation for elementary school. It’s a first step.

Funding for the schools comes from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The funding for childcare comes from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. This sometimes makes our work difficult. Many children have lagging language development. We have a speech therapist available 1 day a week for school children. However, language problems need to be addressed early, before a child even starts

school. Ministries should coordinate this extra funding between them so that speech therapy is also available for young children in daycare. In this way we could have a full-time speech therapist who is widely deployable on the island. That would give language development a major boost.

As director of the expertise center, I believe that we have to provide expertise. That is stipulated in the law. And we need specialists to do that. Because of the different sources of funding, we are not getting that support. BES(t) 4 kids wants to pay part of it now but there should be a structural solution. It is a challenge to bring the expertise that is missing to Saba, to secure it and anchor it in the care structure. I made it my mission to increase knowledge regarding children with special

“We have a speech therapist available 1 day a week for school children. However, language problems need to be addressed early, before a child even starts school.”

needs. Meanwhile, there are improvements in child care. We encourage people by constantly bringing them into our thought process of approaching children positively and in this way working on a child’s development. I see the steps that are being made, but also that we still need a lot of time.” ▶

LESSONS LEARNED



1 FROM COMMON INTEREST

In the BES(t) 4 kids program, Public Entities work together with OCW, SZW, VWS and BZK to improve childcare. That was and is the common interest. We developed and conceived the program together. There is a special program structure with a project leader for each partner. But also, an umbrella program manager (and program secretary) who monitors coherence and ensures that everything

goes smoothly. That works well. However, from the beginning it must be clearly agreed who is responsible and accountable for what. Then, give each other room to work. Work in trust with each other and just start. You cannot have everything figured out in advance. In addition: to work together integrally, it is essential to eliminate the departmental and island divisions.

2 UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER'S BACKGROUNDS, POSITION AND CONTEXT

Understanding each other is sometimes difficult at a time when there is tension and the pressure is high. Because the distance between politics, inhabitants and partners on the islands is small, this pressure can be experienced as stronger on the islands. On the other hand, in The Hague, the minister is the political boss. So there the pressure comes from a very different angle. In both cases it can put pressure on the partners in the program and you must understand that and discuss it openly with each other. An example is that in the BES(t) 4 kids program, efforts

were made simultaneously to lower parental contribution, increase staff salaries and meet quality requirements (including fewer children per staff member). This led to too much pressure on the childcare organizations and thus the local project leaders. There were some tough conversations about this within the program and this is what we do together as well. Even in 'the heat of the moment' we all try to have and keep an eye for the cultural context and local possibilities. In the end, that also strengthens mutual cooperation.

3 QUALITY IMPROVEMENT TAKES TIME!

From idea to implementation takes time, more than we thought in advance. By working, you find out how things really work. Figuring out the legislative process takes years and setting up a local support structure from scratch takes a lot of work. And childcare organizations

must rebuild the store with all the quality improvements while just being open every day. You cannot expect to reach the same level in the Caribbean Netherlands in a few years as in the European Netherlands; it took decades in the European Netherlands as well.

4 DON'T LET DISTANCE RULE, VISIT EACH OTHER BACK AND FORTH

With Corona, online communications have improved. However, we have found that physical presence back and forth is important to reach common ground and, at times, firmly disagree with each other. Live work meetings and consultation sessions played an essential role in building and maintaining a good

relationship and cooperation, and in working out and solidifying all the plans. Together and with each other, essential solutions emerged that do justice to the Caribbean context. Such as porches as indoor spaces and team qualifications rather than just individual qualifications.

5 SUFFICIENT FUNDING IS A PRECONDITION TO REALIZE PLANS

Plans become reality only if there is sufficient money for implementation. This is becoming very clear for the childcare organizations. For example, prescribing that healthy food is necessary, while healthy food on the islands is expensive. Money for implementation is not

only needed at childcare organizations, but also for implementation at the civil service organization of the public entities and central government. It helps enormously if there is an adequate and multi-year budget. This allows the focus to be on the content.

6 TWINNING PROGRAM BEARS FRUIT

The exchange program is working. Sparring with colleagues, learning from each other, working together and seeing and experiencing at other locations how things can be done differently. That helps enormously and is very inspiring for everyone. Saba and St. Eustatius

already have experience with such a twinning program and the results are good. The program also has an enormous positive influence on the quality of childcare. Of course, we wished that for the children and organizations on Bonaire as well, so twinning started there in 2023.

7 ACCEPT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC ENTITIES

Although both the central government and Public Entities are government agencies, they are not always comparable. For instance, the number of employees varies greatly. Therefore, you cannot and should not expect the same pace and the same allocation of resources. However, you can ask for the same commitment from everyone and expect them to stand jointly for decisions taken

in the steering committee. In this steering committee we also try to explicitly consider the (organizational) differences between government agencies in all decisions. This can be challenging, for example when joint decisions are taken within the program that are difficult for one or a few islands and the pressure from the island or childcare organizations is intense.

8 CELEBRATE SUCCESSES!

Everyone's commitment is super inspiring. People are working incredibly hard, at all levels and by everyone involved. This is great to see, but at the same time, not enough attention is paid to the successes that have already been achieved. The focus is often on what still needs to be done or on what is not running smoothly. That is why it is important to take time every

now and then to reflect on what has already been achieved. For instance, the increase in the level of education in the sector, the care structure that is already operational in many places, the parental contribution that has been greatly reduced. We are not there yet but celebrating these successes gives energy and inspiration for the challenges that still lie ahead.

Epilogue

We are incredibly proud of all that already was achieved with BES(t) 4 kids in the past five years. Huge steps were taken from caring for to developing children. The tremendous commitment of everyone is inspiring. We see the enthusiasm but there is also room to be critical. These are wonderful qualities. Together, we managed to create a space for collaboration. We can conclude that the program is a success and we can read that in this publication.



We have learned through the set-up of BES(t) 4 kids how to establish good cooperation across islands and ministries. Through a willingness to work together on the basis of equality, professionalisation, and trust. With the availability of structural resources. With one program for three islands, it is a constant search for what can be done together and where it is necessary to offer local content and customisation. With respect for everyone's expertise and contribution.

And of course, not everything is going well just yet. Those are our lessons learned. We must not forget that no one expects everything to be ready next year. The mutual relationships are now so robust that we can profoundly disagree with each

other, but we are always willing to take the next step together to see what is possible.

When you read all the lovely interviews, it shows the love and commitment for children on Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius. The love and responsibility for the local community. Together, we have a fantastic foundation to continue working sustainably and structurally to make childcare and the connection to primary education a little better every day. So that every child in the Caribbean Netherlands has the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

Ruud Nauts, Program Manager BES(t) 4 kids





BES(t) 4 KIDS