

THIS IS WHAT WE THINK ABOUT IT!

SECOND REPORT BY THE BELGIAN CHILDREN TO THE
COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



Supported by the Belgian Ministry of Justice, the Flemish Government and the French Community

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**THANK YOU
TO ALL THE
YOUNG PEOPLE
PARTICIPATING
IN THIS REPORT.
THIS REPORT
IS YOURS.**

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INTRODUCTION

Dear reader,

What you are looking at is the second report by the Belgian children and young people to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It is special for many reasons.

A SPECIAL REPORT

This report aims at contributing to the important reporting process regarding children's rights. Countries that have signed the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter the "Child Right Convention") have to report their progress in the field of child rights to the UN-Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereafter "Committee") every five years. Apart from the official report every country draws up, non-governmental organizations working around children's rights can also provide the Committee with an alternative report. Finally, children and young people themselves can report to the Committee too. Based on the received reports, the Committee's experts can evaluate how children's rights are respected and formulate recommendations to the government.

The third report by the Belgian government following the UNCRC will be examined by the Committee in 2010. This reporting process is the ideal opportunity to set up a qualitative dialogue with all concerned parties about the application of the Convention in our country. We think it is important to let those who are primarily concerned express themselves. Children and young people are after all best placed to describe and explain how children's rights are being respected in their own lives.

This is not the first report that Belgian children have provided to the Committee. UNICEF Belgium sent the Committee its first children's and young people's report in 2001. It described how Belgian children and young people experience their rights on a daily basis. When reading the recommendations to the Belgian government made by the Committee in 2002, it is clear the children and young people were really listened to. Amongst other things, the Committee recommended that Belgium allows the children to participate more and informs them better about the Child Right Convention. Moreover, it recommended that Belgium takes measures against discrimination and gives special attention to children living in difficult circumstances.

In spite of the many encouragements by the Committee to let children participate in the reporting process, we, to our regret, observe that only a handful of countries have actually set up this kind of process. In Belgium, UNICEF Belgium resolutely chose to involve children very closely in the reporting through the *What do you think?* project. What is more, this report by the children and young people gives special attention to children in vulnerable situations, as they are still too rarely heard.

Although this report is addressed to the Committee, it also wishes to incite Belgian decision makers to start working actively on children's rights and to carry out a policy that is not only taking children into account, but that is made and evaluated TOGETHER with them.

In this respect, this report is an undeniable complement to the official governmental report, and those of the NGOs and the children's rights ombudsmen. For us, it's about more than this report. What preceded this whole process is equally important. This process aims at boosting a true public debate on children's participation, experience and situation throughout all (policy) levels.

WHAT DOES(N'T) THIS REPORT DEAL WITH?

This report tackles the problems, wishes and propositions over which Belgian minors lose their sleep.

We indicate the children's and young people's preoccupations, hoping they can lead to improvements. We hope the Committee's experts will give them attention and take them into consideration in their recommendations, that decision makers can start working with them, and that they will inspire adults and children.

The report is a summary of how children and young persons in Belgium experience the observance of their rights, and of the recommendations they make. It is neither an appraisal of existing government or NGO initiatives, nor a review of the Belgian government's report or the alternative reports by NGOs and children's rights ombudsmen.

There is no conclusion or "top 10" of the most important recommendations by the children or young people to be made. This would close off the debate. We do not see this report as a finishing point, but as a strong instrument which will give extra impetus to the past few years' and next few years' work, and to our advocacy for and with the children for additional respect of their rights.

THE CONNECTING THREADS

The danger of enumerations and summaries is that they can lose the richness of the original and can become vague terms. Tackling the opinion of so many children and young people made in such a long period and concerning so many different themes is a serious challenge. "The" opinion of "the" children and young people does not exist in our country. The following is therefore not a summary or a conclusion, but a collection of a number of findings that keep up appearing. A few of these connecting threads are:

1. A wild enthusiasm amongst the children for being heard, and a great curiosity about what will happen to their voice. Children and young people are not systematically involved in decisions which concern them and, when it happens, they think their opinion is insufficiently taken into account. We observe that being "small" or "vulnerable" is an extra threshold for young children and children living in a vulnerable situation.
2. Being able and allowed to play is an important point being quoted by everyone. It is all about the time and space to play, and the physical and mental access to games and leisure. A lot depends on factors such as the financial threshold, the availability of the parents or the physical accessibility.
3. More play and participation at school. Children want to be involved in making, thinking, deciding, daring and doing.

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4. Children and young people lose sleep over (un)equal opportunities: not only do they say “no” to discrimination, they also want more attention given to this problem, and a positive approach. Discriminated young people and children see a lot of good in increasing the amount of exchanges and contact with other peers.

5. Children and young people do not understand why more is not being done about the environment and sustainability, and why this is not placed higher on the political agenda. It is something they would be willing to roll up their sleeves for.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

We want to give a clear description of what is important according to the children and young people themselves to all those involved and responsible for translating the pretty words of the Convention into daily reality: decision makers on all levels, experts of the Committee, lawyers, teachers, professionals for different sectors, parents, and the children and young people themselves. They can thus take these issues into consideration and see how relevant it is to pay attention to what children and young people think. Together with the children and young people they can work on a family, classroom, school, institution, city or country fit for children.

HOW DID THIS REPORT COME ABOUT?

UNICEF Belgium and the *What do you think?* project

UNICEF Belgium’s *What do you think?* participation project addresses itself to children and young people under 18 in Belgium and aims at improving the right to freedom of speech and participation of children and young people at all levels. *What do you think?* particularly wants to let the children’s voice be heard at the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva.

To set up this report, *What do you think?* started working with numerous partners and both directly and indirectly gathered ideas, wishes and propositions made by children in Belgium. Within the project, special attention was given to vulnerable children (which can be found in the second part of this report), while the Flemish Youth Council and the Youth Council of the French Community were active partners by mobilizing a large number of children and young persons (this contribution is found in the first part of the report).

Within the *What do you think?* project, we systematically chose to work a number of years around a specific issue concerning vulnerable children. The theme choice was made based on the Committee’s recommendations, as well as on the basis of how well they complemented the other existing participation projects. Every time, we ask ourselves which instruments already exist in the participation of specific groups of children and young people. Depending on the theme, other methods are chosen to take all specific aspects of every situation into account.

Five themes are treated in the second part of this report:

1. *Children and young people in conflict with the law*

This chapter (p.34 to 38) is based on information we collected during a debate organized on 5 July 2007. 37 young people ‘in conflict with the law,’ from 16 different institutions, met each other on this occasion. They gave their opinion about the respect of their rights in Belgium. These young people were placed by order of the juvenile court for the committed crimes. The recommendations and quotes appearing in this report come from the debates’ records and from preparatory texts (poems, stories, ...) drawn up by the young people. This chapter also includes recommendations by the Flemish Youth Council.

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2. *Non-accompanied foreign minors*

This chapter (p.39 to 43) is chiefly based on information from the report “What do non-accompanied foreign minors think of it?” This report from 2004 contains ideas and propositions of more than 150 non-accompanied foreign minors who were directly or indirectly involved in the *What do you think?* project. It is the result of many years of work. From August 2002 to 2004 different actions were organized to let the voice of non-accompanied foreign minors be heard. Five years have gone since the report was published, and some things have changed. Together with some fifteen non-accompanied foreign minors we met in July 2009, we have been able to ensure that the concerns and recommendations stated and denounced in the 2004 report still correspond to reality.

3. *Children and young people with a disability*

This chapter (p.44 to 47) is chiefly based on information from the report “We are above all young people.” This report contains the ideas, wishes and propositions of more than 300 young people between 12 and 18 having one or several sensorial, physical or mental disabilities. It is the result of two years of queries as part of the *What do you think?* project. It made use of several methodologies (meetings, debates, questionnaires, drawings, pictures,Ö). In this way we got a better view of how children and young people with a disability experience daily life and of the respect of their rights in Belgium.

4. *Children and young persons in hospital*

This chapter (p.48 to 50) is chiefly based on information from drawings and poems. With the help of the adults working in different services (nurses and education staff in the hospital, animators, educators, etc.), *What do you think?* organized the drawing competition “My hospital in drawing” for all children and young people in paediatric and psychiatric hospitals in Belgium in 2005 and 2006. Children and young people could also give their opinion via a questionnaire. 46 services and over 700 children between 6 and 18 took part in the competition. The result was a collection of drawings and texts which were ordered according to the following themes: hospital staff, visits, treatments, comfort, playing, hospitals in general and psychiatric hospitals. The document was titled “My hospital in pencil. The hospital through children’s eyes.” and concludes by the recommendations of the hospitalized children.

5. *Children and young people in psychiatric services*

Children residing in psychiatric services (the so-called K-services) also took part in the “My hospital in pencil” drawing competition. Many of the drawings made by children in K-services were extremely confrontational. UNICEF Belgium therefore wanted to take the project further and organized an exchange of ideas about “Children’s rights in K-services” on the 26th of June 2007. UNICEF Belgium wanted to give a voice to young people (12-18 years old) residing there, as well as to adult supervisors working with them. We asked participants to prepare themselves and the entire department for the conversation. In total 14 K-services, or about 50 young people, participated. The result is not a quantitative analysis of a representative number of young people. We can however state that the broad participation of 14 (out of 35) geographically nicely spread K-services gives some representation within the different kinds of K-services in Belgium. The children’s opinions presented in this report’s chapter about children in psychiatry (p.51 to 55) are based on the received drawings and on the exchange of ideas that took place with the young people.

In the frame of the *What do you think?* project, UNICEF Belgium is currently conducting a study about children living in poverty. The results of this study should be available during the second half of 2010. Consequently, they have not been integrated in this report.

Apart from contributions from the *What do you think?* project, this report also includes contributions from the Flemish Youth Council and the Youth Council of the French Community. In that way, recommendations made by vulnerable children and young people are completed with information based on a larger group.

The Flemish Youth Council

The Flemish Youth Council strives for a society actively modelled by children. This is done by expressing and strengthening the voice of children, young people, youth advisory organisations and youth organizations. The Flemish Youth Council is the official advisory organisation of the Flemish government for all matters regarding children and young people, and its recommendations have to include their voice. For the Council, contributing to this report was an extra chance for children's rights.

During the last two years, the Flemish Youth Council organized numerous participation opportunities for children and young people. Playful methodologies coaxed quotes from them. How do they look at the world, at the policies, at children's rights? Throughout Flanders, schools, holiday camps and organisations, and also private youth institutions were involved. An additional participative congress (KLETS!) was organized for 1000 young people in 2008.

In 2009, the results of all these participation occasions were taken back to the children and young people (to schools, to enthusiastic youth juries,...). This time, the aim was to work out new, sharper and more concrete recommendations as content for this report. The project was led by a steering group. For some themes, the Council worked together with a number of organisations such as the Flemish scholars' organization (Vlaamse scholierenkoepel), Globelink, Uit de marge,... DoedEskadEen (an organization working on participation) supported us methodically.

A constant was the satisfaction on the children's faces and the enthusiasm in their eyes, for being able to tell their story in their own way: just straight or very calm and seriously. And it was always from their own experience. One thing is clear to them: a lot of challenges lie ahead in the future, and that future starts now.

The Youth Council of the French Community

Due to changes in their legal frame, the Youth Council of the French Community is going through a thorough reorganization during this second semester of 2009. At the end of the year, it will consist of elected young people and no longer of recognized youth organizations, as was the case during the preparations to this report.

The collected information dates from the time this Council was still named CJEF (Conseil de la Jeunesse d'Expression Française, or Council for the French-speaking Youth). Under the former frame, and on UNICEF Belgium's demand, the Childhood Commission (Commission Enfance) of the CJEF decided to participate in this child and youth report.

The Childhood Commission of the CJEF is open to all youth organizations, and in practice deals the organisations working with 'children' younger than 12. Amongst others, the task of the Commission involves the exchange of information, and the monitoring and interpellation proceedings regarding the innumerable legal frames applied to the sector of children aged 3 to 12.

For more than one year, we asked youth organizations and their monitors to listen to their children on a daily basis, in order to collect their opinions for us. Propositions were made to

organize activities focusing on children's rights, aiming at gathering children's opinions. The CJEF made use of the Representatives' Fair to collaborate and listen to 200 children in primary education.

Due to the specific composition of the Childhood Commission, we registered the opinions of children mainly aged 8 to 12 (about 75%). This was done in their own words, spontaneously... A quarter of the answers come from the minor monitors.

All opinions were collected in a database. Every entry contains one opinion, either complete or partly complete. 1 to 3 key words were attributed to each of these entries, in order for us to sort and group them. Based on these, we defined 10 priorities adopted in this report.

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PART I

THE FLEMISH YOUTH COUNCIL AND THE YOUTH COUNCIL OF THE FRENCH COMMUNITY

PARTICIPATION

1 OUR VOICE!

We want our voice to count, too. We still have very few opportunities to give our opinion and our voice is rarely listened to. We can sometimes express our opinion, but it is not taken into consideration, which we think is a pity and a waste of time.

WHEN THE TOPIC CONCERNS US DIRECTLY, WE THINK THAT WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW, TO UNDERSTAND AND TO GIVE OUR OPINION.

We want our opinion to be asked for, to be taken into consideration and to be respected.

We want our own space and own means to express our opinion.

We want adults to support us by spreading our opinion (for example in class or at school).

We think it is important to be free to express our opinion or not to do so.

We want to learn how to listen and to respect others.

2 HOME

WE WANT MORE CONFIDENCE FROM OUR PARENTS. At home, a lot depends on what mom and dad say and decide. We are allowed to make or help make decisions about a few things, but our freedom to choose friends, to spend our pocket money, to choose which clothes we wear, is limited. Parents act like this because of their concern, which we do understand, but still we would like to feel more trusted.

We want parents to listen to our opinions. We want to take part in making decisions on small (odd jobs, punishments, clothes) and big (residence, school) issues in our life.

Our parents need to have information about the different ways in which they can let kids participate in daily life.

There should be an organisation which parents can rely on when they have questions.

WE WANT TO BE HEARD IF OUR PARENTS DIVORCE, so that our opinion is taken into consideration when it comes down to the assignment of custody; we want our parents to talk to us about the divorce before it is too late. Moreover, we want systems and activities to be set up so that children get the opportunity to see their parents.

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3 AT SCHOOL

Participation at school is another element that makes us feel good.

SOME SCHOOLS ALREADY HAVE STUDENT COUNCILS. WE THINK THIS CAN BE A GOOD WAY TO EXPRESS OUR OPINIONS. However, the school board often doesn't listen to what we say in a student council and our opinions is not taken into consideration.

We want to give our opinions and feel that they are genuinely taken into consideration. We want our ideas to be considered and treated seriously.

We would like to have more participation in the conception of the classroom, the school and the playground. The teacher and the school board need to have be aware of this.

In class, we want more say about the homework and the punishments we get. Useless punishments should be abolished. We need to have an explanation about why we get them.

We have a lot of wonderful ideas on interesting classes, theme days and outings, and we would like to work them out together with our teachers.

WE WOULD LIKE A SUPPORTING ORGANISATION FOR PARTICIPATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

4 IN OUR TOWN COUNCIL

IN OUR TOWN COUNCIL, WE ALSO WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN TALKS AND THINKING PROCESSES: ABOUT STREETS AND PLAYGROUNDS, SCHOOLS,...

We should have a voice in youth councils. Often, they are composed of older young people only. **WE THINK YOUTH COUNCILS SHOULD BE SUPPORTED AND THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS SHOULD BE LISTENED TO.**

WE ALSO WANT YOUNGER PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THINKING PROCESSES AND TALKS BY SETTING UP INTERESTING PROJECTS. Tailored to us and aiming at our participation. This can be achieved by a survey with a contest, a large game on the playground, or by sending postcards with our ideas.

5 HIGHER LEVEL (COMMUNITIES AND SO ON)

Ministers also take a large number of decisions strongly affecting us. **WE THINK THEY SHOULD LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BEFORE TAKING A DECISION, AND TAKE THIS VOICE INTO CONSIDERATION.**

Youth councils gather our voices and give ministers advice, which we strongly approve. It should however not stop here. Ministers should come to see us and talk with us. We could create a website on which young people can post their opinions, to which ministers and political decision makers have immediate access.

EDUCATION

1 GOING TO SCHOOL EVERY DAY...

We are happy to be able to go there, as we learn new things that are both useful now and later. We learn how to live together and we see our friends. However, schools have not been sufficiently adapted to our needs.

WE WANT TO FEEL GOOD AT SCHOOL. A range of things can improve that feeling:

- **HAVING FRIENDS AT SCHOOL.** Friendship in school is very important to us. We feel bad whenever there is a quarrel or even worse, someone being bullied. Schools need to be responsible for themselves, in helping the children as well as improving school rules which may cause bullying. We would certainly like to help think about that.
- **A GOOD ATMOSPHERE IN CLASS AND AT SCHOOL:** by showing confidence in children, spending time to learn how to live together, taking time to solve conflicts in class, playing games that require working together, avoiding everyday competition,...
- **SAFETY AT SCHOOL**
- **STUDENT GUIDANCE**
- **FUN TEACHERS**
- **GOOD INFRASTRUCTURE**
- **PARTICIPATION AT SCHOOL IS ANOTHER ELEMENT THAT GIVES US A GOOD FEELING!**

2 INFRASTRUCTURE

WE WANT ADAPTED INFRASTRUCTURE.

AT SCHOOL, WE WANT TO TAKE PART IN DECIDING THE CONCEPTION OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND SPACE.

WE WANT MORE PLAY AREAS AT SCHOOL. We have come up with different propositions: a sufficient amount of green areas at school; areas (inside or covered) to stay when it rains; more sporting facilities on the playground or in a separate place on the playground; a (multifunctional) room where we have time for ourselves ('to lounge', 'to chill out', 'to play games',...) and which are accessible to everyone.

WE WANT ENOUGH AND CLEAN TOILETS AT SCHOOL!

WE WANT COLOURS AT SCHOOL! On the classroom walls, in the hallway, in the toilets, on the playground. We prefer bright, flashy colours over pastel colours.

WE WANT MANY OPEN SPACES IN OUR SCHOOLS AND LARGE CLASSROOMS. This means well lit, green schools.

SCHOOLS ACCESSIBLE TO ALL PUPILS ARE A PRIORITY TO US. Wheelchair users should be able to move around easily in school buildings.

WHEN SOMETHING BREAKS DOWN, WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE IT REPAIRED QUICKLY.

3 CLASSES

We have some wishes about our classes...

EVERY CLASSROOM SHOULD BE EQUIPPED WITH A COMPUTER WITH AN INTERNET CONNECTION.

We are absolutely convinced of the usefulness of computer classes at school, but every subject should require computer use. We applaud the use of smart boards, but we do not want to overdo them. We should only work with them in classes with many images or drawings.

IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS, WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE AT LEAST ONE HOUR A WEEK DESTINED TO MANUAL LABOUR.

We would like to suggest a few ideas: a vegetable garden at school that we all maintain (the vegetables can be used to make us familiar with healthy cooking), a few 'school pets' to take care of, tinkering or learning techniques.

WE WANT SUFFICIENT AND MODERN MATERIALS THAT ARE CURRENTLY USED IN THE WORKING WORLD!

In order to prepare us for the labour market, schools should receive enough money to invest in these materials.

WE WANT ENOUGH SPORT CLASSES AT SCHOOL. At this moment there are too few. We also greatly approve of interschool competition, which can be organised after classes.

OUTINGS LINKED TO CLASSES GIVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE SUBJECT MATTER. The costs for these outings should not be up to the pupils. Hence, the government should help to provide that money.

SCHOOLS HAVE TO TAKE THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ALL PUPILS INTO CONSIDERATION. Every pupil should be able to keep up with the classes.

WE WANT MORE PARTICIPATION IN THE CATERING AT OUR SCHOOLS. We want to have our say in this school policy.

4 THE TEACHERS

WE WANT GOOD TEACHERS.

Teachers are very important to us, as they have to teach us many subjects and prepare us for the following years. Moreover, they are in front of our classes every single day .

That is why we have drawn up a list of characteristics and qualities we would like teachers to have. This list can be useful in teacher training classes...

IN ORDER TO DEAL WITH CHILDREN, TEACHERS NEED TO HAVE MANY QUALITIES. They should be able to listen well and try to understand us, let us finish whenever we have to say something, let us express our opinion, be honest and fair, respect us, make us feel safe, do what they promise, encourage us and be helpful, act firmly so that we have respect for them.

IN PRIMARY SCHOOL WE PREFER TEACHERS WHO CREATE A PLEASANT ATMOSPHERE, play with us every now and then, make room for relaxing, be funny and be able to take a joke.

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CLASSES SHOULD BE USEFUL AND ORIGINAL. A personal touch by the teacher makes them even more fun. Teachers should explain well, write clearly and check our assignments and tests correctly.

WE THINK OF HOMEWORK AS NECESSARY AND DO SEE THE USEFULNESS OF IT, BUT THERE SHOULD NOT BE TOO MUCH OF IT. WHAT IS MORE, WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK THE TEACHERS TO GIVE US MORE ENJOYABLE HOMEWORK, such as doing crosswords, interviewing someone...

WE THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO GIVE FEEDBACK TO OUR TEACHERS. We want to do this properly, not just by singing someone's praises or by criticizing.

5 EQUAL RIGHTS

WE WANT EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL PUPILS: all children and young people should be given the unconditional right on education.

WE NEED TO BE ACCEPTED IN ALL SCHOOLS. CHILDREN FACING DIFFICULTIES CAN NOT BE REFUSED. Moreover, there should not be good and bad schools: a school should always be good.

The role of education is extremely important in finding our place in society afterwards.

That is why we think it important: that education be free, that there can be an individual approach for certain pupils (e.g. in language courses), that pupils can be brought in to help class mates or other pupils, that children of deprived families can have access to scholarships.

WE THINK EDUCATION HAS AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO FULFILL IN THE FIGHT AGAINST DISCRIMINATION.

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DISCRIMINATION

1 A POSITIVE DIVERSITY

There is a great diversity amongst children in Belgium. We like this diversity as it enables us to meet different aspects of reality and different ways of thinking.

WE THINK DIVERSITY SHOULD BE APPROACHED POSITIVELY. ALL CHILDREN AND ADULTS SHOULD HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS, OPPORTUNITIES AND DUTIES. WE NO LONGER WANT CHILDREN TO BE DISCRIMINATED.

WE WANT TO LEARN HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER:

- There should be more 'mixed' meeting places
- There should be no differences between children (language, town, financial means,...)
- The continuous quarrelling between Flemish speaking and French speaking citizens should come to an end.

WE WANT TO LEARN HOW TO REACT TO DISCRIMINATION:

- There should be an environment in which we can oppose discrimination without fear. We need an approachable complaints centre where we can report discrimination. We ourselves face bullying or see children being dealt with differently. We really want to oppose discrimination, but it is not that easy. We sometimes fear negative reactions.
- We think that discriminating people should be punished. However, punishing alone will not do the trick. They have to be taught what discrimination is and why it is not be tolerated.

2 IN EDUCATION

WE WANT EDUCATION (OF ALL SORTS) TO FULFILL ITS IMPORTANT ROLE IN FIGHTING AGAINST DISCRIMINATION.

ALL SCHOOLS SHOULD BE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE: PHYSICALLY, FINANCIALLY AND SOCIALLY.

IT SHOULD BE MADE CLEAR TO YOUNG PEOPLE WHAT DISCRIMINATION CAN MEAN AND WHAT CONSEQUENCES IT CAN ENTAIL FOR SOMEONE. Apart from providing the right information, projects, meetings, and so forth on the issue of diversity should be organized.

THERE SHOULD BE GREATER INVESTMENTS IN MIXED SCHOOLS, TO LEARN HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER WITH EVERYONE. TEACHERS SHOULD BE SUFFICIENTLY SUPPORTED, so that they handle the mix of pupils (children with disabilities, ADHD, foreign children,...)

ALL SUBJECTS SHOULD PAY ATTENTION TO DISCRIMINATION. This can be done in a positive way by introducing diversity in everyday issues.

AT SCHOOL, CAUSES FOR DISCRIMINATION SHOULD BE DISCUSSABLE. We want no more taboos.

3 IN GOVERNANCE

WE WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO INVEST IN PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND NOT TO BE NARROW-MINDED. Everyone is equal.

WE WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO SUPPORT PROJECTS AND ORGANIZATIONS WHICH AIM AT DIVERSITY AND INTEGRATION.

WE WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE and not to exclude anyone from working in its services. We also want it to stimulate companies to treat everyone equally, especially those groups of people (foreign people, disabled people, but also young people) who face exclusion and difficulties in finding a job.

4 "FOREIGNERS" SHOULD NOT BE DISCRIMINATED

WE WANT A CLEARER AND MORE RAPID PROCEDURE TO GIVE PEOPLE RESIDING IN OUR COUNTRY A PROSPECT OF THEIR FUTURE, for them to know if they can, or cannot, stay in Belgium.

PEOPLE WHO SEEK ASYLUM, TOO, SHOULD GET THE RIGHT INFORMATION. It should be tailored to their needs and clearly understandable. They should be given the opportunity to ask their questions and should be given support, even when they have not obtained asylum.

EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIND A GOOD JOB AND TO LEARN THE LANGUAGE. Education and the labour market should aim at 'foreigners' and give them more and equal opportunities.

Newcomers should be willing to adapt to a certain extent and get to know the particularities of our country.

5 A POSITIVE IMAGE

A POSITIVE IMAGE SHOULD BE CREATED:

THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD MAKE PEOPLE MORE AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TOLERANCE AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES.

Parents, sport coaches, leaders of youth movements, or teachers **SHOULD BE GIVEN MORE INSTRUCTIONS ON DIVERSITY.** That is how they will learn not to avoid speaking about diversity and discrimination.

NEWS BROADCASTS SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON LESS BIASED REPORTS. We get to see many negative aspects about foreigners; we therefore get the wrong image about them. We get to see nothing but stereotypes, which we totally disapprove of. A more realistic and complete image can be conceived by: increasing the awareness of this problem during journalism trainings, large campaigns, giving tolerance awards to media companies when they make efforts to adjust the image of foreigners in a positive way.

FINALLY, WE WANT YOUNG PEOPLE TO BE MORE RESPECTED. WE WANT active young people to be given **MORE ATTENTION** and more confidence.

LAISURE - PLAY

1 OUR FREE TIME

When we don't have to go to school, we have free time. We use it to study, do homework, do activities with our families, play and have hobbies.

WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO HAVE HOBBIES DURING HOLIDAYS AND THE SCHOOL YEAR, NO MATTER HOW OLD WE ARE OR WHERE WE LIVE.

We have noticed this is not always possible:

- Hobbies are often very expensive;
- The activities are not available everywhere;
- There is not always anything exciting to do during holidays;
- Our parents decide for us;
- When our parents work, we have to go to childcare;
- In Belgium there is not enough space or opportunities to play outside.

2 IDEAS!

WE WANT TO GUARANTEE ACCESS TO HOBBIES FOR ALL CHILDREN:

- by mixing different groups of children (not always children from problem areas);
- by simplifying the access to the swimming pools in the municipalities;
- by supporting games areas and spaces where you can play with other children or adults.

WE WANT TO OFFER MORE VARIED ACTIVITIES.

WE WANT TO HAVE OUR OWN MEETING SPACE:

- by having more parks, playgrounds and playing fields in areas where children live. We need space outside to play, move around and make friends. For example we want a playground in every village.
- by existing spaces being maintained, by having more and colourful equipment in the parks, and by renewing them once in a while.
- by ensuring that the park is fun and feels like a playground: hills, fountains, plants,... and enough benches for our parents so that they like coming to the park with us; free drinking fountains in the park; enough spaces where we can do sports.
- by subsidizing existing initiatives and projects. We want initiatives (youth work) organised for us by the government to be fully recognized and to get enough support and funding.

WE WANT PLAY AREAS TO BE ACCESSIBLE DURING HOLIDAYS by 'opening' schools and letting us play on the football fields.

WE WANT TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN PROJECTS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF PLAYGROUNDS IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS. WE WANT TO HAVE OUR SAY ABOUT THESE PLAYGROUNDS AND ABOUT CONSTRUCTIONS IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS.

WE WANT TO HAVE REAL FREE TIME during which we can choose; by letting parents getting home early from work so that we can play; by having free time after school: we don't always have to study; by not forcing children to participate in competitions.

WE WANT EVERY CHILD TO BE ABLE TO GO ON HOLIDAY.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



ENVIRONMENT

1 LIVING IN AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY SURROUNDING

WE THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO LIVE, LEARN, PLAY, AND SO ON IN AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY SURROUNDING

There is too much pollution in Belgium and too little is done for the environment. Environmentally friendly transport and alternative energy sources are insufficiently stimulated.

WE WANT TO BE INVOLVED MORE IN THE TALKS AND DECISIONS.

This world is also ours. It is a pity that environment is not a priority for adults. We have to think further than Belgium and take worldwide action.

2 POLLUTION

WE WANT LESS POLLUTION.

WE WANT LESS CARS ON THE ROADS by organizing more car free Sundays, stimulating more people to take public transport, promoting carpooling, making bicycles cheaper. The public transport's infrastructure has to be improved (see mobility).

WE WANT MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY CARS by making environmentally friendly cars cheaper, and heavily polluting cars more expensive. Company cars should not be fiscally deductible any longer and only environmentally friendly cars can be accepted.

WE WANT LESS PACKAGING. It is better to buy unpacked goods.

WE WANT WASTE TO BE SORTED OUT BETTER AT HOME, but especially at school and in the city. There still aren't any pmd-collectors (paper, metal and drink packages) on the municipal square.

WE WANT TO ASK ADULTS TO SET A GOOD EXAMPLE. There is too much rubbish along the roads. There have to be more garbage collectors and they have to be emptied regularly.

3 ENERGY

WE WANT A BETTER ENVIRONMENT.

WE WANT MORE GREEN ENERGY. The government has to look for more renewable energy sources. We want a quick application of wind turbines and solar energy in our daily lives.

SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES HAS TO BE RELEASED MORE QUICKLY IN ORDER FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY TECHNOLOGIES TO BE PUT IN PRACTICE MORE RAPIDLY.

We need European guidelines about green energy, and high environmental standards with sanctions. Environmentally friendly behaviour has to be rewarded.

4 NATURE

Not all children are equal regarding nature: there is lots more pollution in the city and we don't all have access to playing areas in nature and forests where we can play freely.

WE WANT MORE NATURE: PROTECT NATURAL AREAS; MAINTAIN GREEN AREAS IN THE CITY AND AT SCHOOL BETTER AND MORE OFTEN; MORE TREES AND FORESTS ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYBODY; MORE GREEN AREAS TO PLAY IN (PARKS, RECREATIONAL FORESTS, PLAY AREAS).

5 CONSUMING DIFFERENTLY

We want to limit our consumption (limiting water usage, consuming differently by using second hand clothes for example, reducing the use of some machines), and we want other people to consume conscientiously.

THE GOVERNMENT HAS TO HELP MAKE THIS POSSIBLE AND RECOGNISE GOOD MEASURES, RATHER THAN PUNISH BAD ONES.

WE WANT CAMPAIGNS INFORMING US ABOUT THE EFFECTS AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR EFFORTS.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
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ABOUT IT!**



MOBILITY

1 SAFETY AND ACCESSIBILITY

WE WANT TO MOVE AROUND SAFELY AND INDEPENDENTLY.

We therefore want:

SAFE BICYCLE- AND FOOTPATHS. We want to move around safely by foot or bicycle. On a safe distance from motorways, but this doesn't mean that the car is king and can drive faster. If we have to be on dangerous roads, we want bicycle paths to be clearly indicated, with fluorescent colours, traffic signs and lines on the road.

MORE LIGHTING ON SMALL ROADS.

CAR DRIVERS HAVE TO BE ENCOURAGED TO DRIVE SAFELY AND COURTEOUSLY. We are vulnerable in the traffic. It is possible to encourage safe driving by making use of awareness campaigns, punishing drivers when committing an offence, and giving the right information to drivers about the consequences of driving too fast.

WE WANT MORE SAFETY IN THE VICINITY OF SCHOOLS AND AREAS MEANT FOR CHILDREN: by placing speed bumps and policemen which drivers are afraid of; by placing signs like 'not faster than 30' and 'caution, children'; by ensuring more lighting for pedestrian crossings at night or when it's foggy; by giving everyone fluorescent jackets; by painting more pedestrian crossings.

THE ROAD HAS TO BE ACCESSIBLE FOR US TOO. We want everyone to be able to move around. All the buildings, footpaths and roads have to be adapted for disabled people to have access everywhere.

2 PUBLIC TRANSPORT

PUBLIC TRANSPORT HAS TO BE CHEAP, ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY, CHILD FRIENDLY AND EASY.

We therefore want:

MORE BUSES, TRAINS AND TRAMS. Especially when we go back home when school is finished. So that everybody has a seat and fewer children have to be taken by car. And more night buses, to give people the chance to go by public transport at night.

FREE BUSES, TRAINS AND TRAMS. Not only for seniors, also for us and poor people. Because going by bus, train or tram is still too expensive.

THAT IT WOULD GET EASIER TO GO BY BUS, TRAIN AND TRAM: by putting the stop closer to the houses; by making getting on and off the bus safer (with crossings and footpaths nearby); by aligning trains and buses (tickets, timetables, network); by ensuring safe bicycle sheds at bus and tram stops.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
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HEALTH AND PREVENTION

1 BREAKING TABOOS

There still are a lot of taboos about health, prevention of diseases, alcohol, drugs, sex, abortion, euthanasia, anorexia, obesity,...

There is a great lack of information about healthy food, drugs, alcohol,... **WE WANT TO MAKE OUR OWN CHOICES AND WANT TO RECEIVE THE CORRECT INFORMATION TO DO SO.** We don't want to be patronized, but sometimes we do find we have to be protected by making sure we don't come into contact with dangerous substances like drugs. Our school and parents play a central part in giving correct information.

WE WANT TO BREAK THESE TABOOS AND MAKE THESE ISSUES MORE DISCUSSIBLE.

2 AT HOME, AT SCHOOL AND IN THE MEDIA

WITH OUR PARENTS

WE WANT TO TALK MORE EASILY AND OPENLY TO OUR PARENTS. They have to be informed about how to present some issues openly and in our own language.

AT SCHOOL

EVERY YEAR, WE WANT TIME IN THE TEACHING PACKAGE TO WORK AROUND ALCOHOL, DRUGS, SEX,... This has to start in primary school and has to take the specific situation of every class into consideration. Nobody has to be obliged to participate.

WE DON'T WISH TO HEAR ONLY SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT HEALTH AND PREVENTION. A PERSONAL TESTIMONY OR INFORMATION ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS HAVE MORE IMPACT. We want information that is not patronizing. No information telling us what we should or shouldn't do, but information helping us making conscious choices.

WE WANT TO HAVE FACILITIES AT SCHOOL AND THE POSSIBILITY TO SPEAK TO A CONFIDANT IN AN INFORMAL WAY.

VIA THE MEDIA

WE WANT HEALTH AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS. Campaigns have to speak for themselves, shouldn't contain too much text, should have clear images, and be tailored to children and young people. The opinion of young people should be taken more into account when creating these campaigns.

WE WANT MORE RELIABLE INFORMATION IN THE INTERNET, BECAUSE WE FIND A LOT OF INFORMATION THERE. The advantage of internet is that you can inform yourself anonymously. We want to see the documentaries about problems and dangers regarding health, drugs, alcohol and sex on TV. They have to be adapted to all age groups and have recognizable information for young people, not showing all the extremes.

3 HEALTHY EATING

WE WANT HEALTHY EATING TO BE PROMOTED.

WE THINK PARENTS SHOULD BE MADE MORE AWARE OF IT.

We want healthy and varied food and drinks at school, not only via a one-off project, but in a sustainable way.

We want fair trade foods to be easily available at school and in youth centres.

We want healthy food to become cheaper, so that all children can eat in a healthy way. We also want all children to get enough food to check their hunger.

4 SPORTS

WE WANT SPORTS TO BE ENCOURAGED MORE: by a wider variety of available sports at school; via creative actions by the town council and the government such as “Start to run”; by making sports cheaper.

5 MORE ATTENTION FOR HEALTH AND PREVENTION

In Belgium, you have to be rich to be in good health: healthy eating is more expensive, doctors and medicines are expensive, care is expensive, ...
There is too little attention paid to healthy food, sports and prevention of diseases.

WE WANT MORE ATTENTION PAID TO HEALTH AND DISEASE PREVENTION IN PUBLIC SPACES:

WE ASK FOR ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES FOR EVERYONE: free doctors’ consultations for children, and places we can see a doctor without our parents.

WE WANT BETTER AND MORE FREQUENT ACCESS TO DECENT PUBLIC TOILETS.

WE WANT BIRTH CONTROL AND CONDOMS TO BE FREE in pharmacies, and more condom vending machines in public places (in pubs, cinemas, night shops, nightclubs, shopping streets...).

WE WANT NON-SMOKING PUBLIC SPACES, especially where food is served.

REPRESSION CAN NOT BE THE ONLY MEASURE AGAINST CIGARETTES AND ALCOHOL.

Adults, young people and in particular children need to know the right information about the dangers of alcohol and tobacco.

WE WANT ENOUGH ATTENTION GIVEN TO PSYCHIC PROBLEMS.

INFORMATION

1 BETTER CHOICES THROUGH A LOT OF GOOD INFORMATION

We generally believe that we are well-informed. Young people know where they can find information about hobbies and activities. But when we get more specific questions, we realize that we are often ignorant about issues concerning us!

WE WANT ACCURATE AND RELIABLE INFORMATION.

We live in a world in which information is necessary, because we need to make choices important to our future. A large amount of information can help us in making better choices. However, sometimes we don't find enough information, or it turns out not be correct. Despite the large amount of information on offer, it does not always provide us with an answer to our question.

WE WANT MORE INFORMATION TO BE GIVEN ABOUT OUR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, NOT ONLY BY THE GOVERNMENT, BUT ALSO BY INFORMATION ORGANISATIONS AND OUR SCHOOLS.

We might be minors, but we have our rights, too. Some adults tend to forget this. Still, children often do not know what rights they have.

2 KEY FIGURES AND CONFIDANTS

FRIENDS, PARENTS, FAMILY AND SCHOOL ARE IMPORTANT INFORMATION SOURCES TO US. We look for and get a lot of information from our parents, sisters, brothers, friends, teachers,...

THEY NEED TO HAVE THE RIGHT INFORMATION TO ENABLE THEM TO HELP US MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES.

This can be achieved by:

- making **SPECIAL WEBSITES AND BROCHURES** about all kinds of subjects that matter to us. These websites and brochures should be aimed at parents and teachers who can pass the right information on to us.
- **PASS ON LOTS OF INFORMATION ABOUT SUBJECTS THAT WE, AT SCHOOL, THINK OF AS IMPORTANT.** This doesn't happen enough. We want the school to give us that information: about the labour market, our choice of courses, safe traffic, sexuality and relations,...

WE WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MEDIA AT SCHOOL.

To many of us, politics sounds like a very vague word, simply because we do not know much about it. However, in a couple of years from now, we will have to vote, too. In order to make the right choice, we need the right information. **WE WANT SCHOOLS TO TEACH US RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE INFORMATION ABOUT POLITICS AND COMPULSORY VOTING: WHAT IS DEMOCRACY, HOW IS BELGIUM ORGANISED POLITICALLY, WHAT PARTIES ARE THERE TO CHOOSE FROM, WHAT IDEAS DO THEY STAND FOR, WHAT BACKGROUND DO THEY HAVE,...?**

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



3 ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION

We ourselves look for information on the internet, in the library, by phoning to youth and children's organizations, by consulting the local information desk for young people,...

WE WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS WHO GIVE CLEAR INFORMATION, ESPECIALLY TO US. WE SHOULD HAVE FREE AND EASY ACCESS TO IT WHENEVER WE HAVE QUESTIONS. This is possible through the internet or a free telephone service with a wide-spread telephone number.

THERE SHOULD ALSO BE A PLACE WHERE WE CAN ASK QUESTIONS ANONYMOUSLY. MOREOVER, WE WANT THE INFORMATION AND TELEPHONE SERVICES AND THE WEBSITES TO BE ANONYMOUS AND FREE. WE THINK WE CAN CLAIM THIS PRIVACY. Our parents should not always know what information we are looking for and what questions we have.

INFORMATION SHOULD BE CLEAR AND UNDERSTANDABLE, EVEN TO US. WE WANT TO TAKE PART IN WRITING UP INFORMATION, as we know best what our questions are, which words we understand and how we look for information.

THE WAY THE INFORMATION IS BEING PRESENTED ALSO MATTERS A LOT TO US. We want websites and brochures to look nice and yet provide us with the right information. This will encourage us to read them.

4 THE INTERNET

The internet is a way of finding information and also of making friends. There are however many websites that are unsuitable or even dangerous for us.

WE WANT TO BE ABLE TO LOOK FOR THE INFORMATION WE WANT ON THE INTERNET. WE WANT ALL CHILDREN TO HAVE EASY ACCESS TO INTERNET. FOR THIS, INTERNET COULD BE PROVIDED BY SCHOOLS DURING BREAKS, BY LIBRARIES, BY YOUTH CENTRES,...

THE GOVERNMENT COULD HELP FAMILIES WITH FINANCIAL PROBLEMS TO HAVE INTERNET ACCESS.

WE WANT THE INTERNET TO BE SAFE, SO WE CAN USE IT WITHOUT ANY FEAR. This can be achieved by installing filters that protect us from unsuitable websites.

Chat rooms and web2.0 applications, popular among us, should be scanned for paedophiles, pornographic messages and bullying. We can make out ourselves fairly well what websites we should or should not go to. But sometimes it is impossible for us to be sure and that is exactly what we should be protected from.

5 THE MEDIA

WHEN WE ARE IN THE NEWS, WE WANT TO BE GIVEN A POSITIVE IMAGE AND WE ALSO WANT TO SEE MORE POSITIVE NEWS. In newspapers and on television we are often depicted negatively, especially the older children. News is made by adults and for adults, we clearly notice that.

WE WANT TO HEAR THE OPINION OF OTHER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, NOT ONLY OF ADULTS. There are children's newscasts, which we like, as we get to hear the opinion of other children. We would like to see this in other programmes, too. We and the adults would get to know the opinion of children.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



POVERTY¹

1 TOO MANY CHILDREN STILL LIVE IN POVERTY IN BELGIUM

In Belgium, too many children still live in poverty. Not all children in our country have the same rights. The financial crisis threatens to send an ever-increasing number of families into poverty. The propensity to poverty is much higher among children raised in single parent families, and among foreign families.

WE WANT LESS CHILDREN TO LIVE IN POVERTY.

WE WANT MORE FOOD AND MONEY TO BE GIVEN TO THE POOR:

THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED BY DISTRIBUTING FOOD PARCELS AND OFFERING HELP. ALL OF THIS SHOULD BE COMBINED WITH INCENTIVES CONCERNING EMPLOYMENT, FOSTERING... because they shouldn't become too dependent of this helping hand.

BY CREATING MORE SOCIAL RESTAURANTS (a social restaurant is a place where you can find cheap food; at the same time it has a social employment programme) where poor people can work and eat.

BY RAISING MONEY AND DISTRIBUTING IT TO THE PEOPLE WHO REALLY NEED IT.

AT SCHOOL, HOT MEALS COULD BE OFFERED TO POOR CHILDREN. This should not be communicated openly, but the children could profit from it the way they do from scholarships.

WE WANT BELGIUM TO SHELTER MORE POOR PEOPLE.

Some children live in the street and do not have a bed or a house to sleep in or they live in filthy and unsafe houses.

WE WANT MORE SHELTERS AND HOSTELS FOR POOR PEOPLE.

WE WANT BELGIUM TO HAVE ITS EMPTY BUILDINGS SERVING AS CENTRES FOR THE HOMELESS.

WE WANT HOUSES TO BE MORE AFFORDABLE AND THE PRICES FOR WATER, GAS AND ELECTRICITY TO DROP. WE THINK CUTTING OFF WATER, GAS AND ELECTRICITY IN HOUSES WHERE FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN LIVE IS UNACCEPTABLE.

We want the money to be distributed more equally:

THE RICH SHOULD EARN LESS AND THE POOR SHOULD EARN MORE. WAGES SHOULD BE DIVIDED MORE EQUALLY. Some people work hard and hardly earn any money, others do not work hard and make a lot of money. By awarding equal wages to everyone, there would be less poverty. Our repartition system however should remain fair: harder working or higher qualified people should still be able to earn more.

¹ The following recommendations were accumulated by the Flemish Youth Council and are not necessarily those of children and young people in poverty themselves. As part of the What do you think? project, UNICEF Belgium is making a study about children living in poverty. The results will be published in the second half of 2010.

Everything is very expensive here. Our parents cannot always give us what we want or need. All prices should drop, especially the ones for food, drinks, clothes, books, toys, houses. The government could instruct youth movements how to keep the prices of their annual camps down.

TAXES SHOULD BE CUT, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF THE POOR PEOPLE.

WE WANT POOR PEOPLE TO HAVE ACCESS TO TRANSPORT. THIS IS IMPORTANT, FOR KIDS TOO. THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO TRAVEL BY BUS OR TRAIN FOR FREE. ALL CHILDREN SHOULD HAVE A BIKE, WHICH WOULD ENABLE THEM TO GO TO SCHOOL OR PLAYING AREAS.

WE WANT ALL PEOPLE TO BE ABLE TO FIND A JOB, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE POOR NOW.

WE WANT ALL CHILDREN TO BE ABLE TO GO TO SCHOOL FOR FREE. We learn many things and get more opportunities thanks to our education.

WE WANT EVERY CHILD TO HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE.

WE WANT EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERY CHILD. We cannot stand things such as favouritism or relatives helping find a job. If you are poor, you don't have a network of people helping you, and so you will get fewer opportunities. It is very hard to break out of this spiral.

2 POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

In other countries there are many poor children too. We think that we, Belgians, should do something for them as well.

WE THEREFORE WANT MORE MONEY TO BE SPENT ON DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION:

BY INVESTING IN WATER SUPPLIES AND FOOD FOR POOR CHILDREN.

BY HELPING TO CONSTRUCT SCHOOLS IN POOR COUNTRIES.

BY PREVENTING WAR THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

BY HELPING ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING DEVELOPMENT AID.

BY CREATING A MORE POSITIVE IMAGE OF DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION. Successful projects on TV shows should show their results.

YOUTH CARE

1 PLACEMENT

WE WANT ALTERNATIVES FOR PLACEMENT TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION FOR EVERYONE.

A placement in an institution is not the best solution for everyone. The alternatives for every young person (foster care, being taken care of by relatives,...) should be taken into consideration in juvenile courts. Our opinion about this is important, too.

We feel dubious about our society when we see more and more children and young people in need of help every year. It is up to our society to do something about this.

We also feel dubious about parents. **PARENTS SHOULD BE GIVEN HELP AS WELL. FOR EVERY CHILD IN AN INSTITUTION, THERE IS A MOM AND A DAD WHO DID OR COULD NOT DO HIS DUTY PROPERLY.**

WE WANT SOMETHING TO BE DONE ABOUT THE WAITING LISTS FOR PLACEMENTS IN INSTITUTIONS. We are strongly against these waiting lists. Children and young people cannot be helped in time and all children who do not face an extreme situation remain on these lists for a long time.

2 LIFE IN INSTITUTIONS

WE WANT TO HAVE PARTICIPATION IN INSTITUTIONS.

We think this is very important. **WE WANT TO BE ASKED FOR OUR OPINION,** on matters such as money for clothing, food, spare time activities. **WE THINK THIS SHOULD BE GIVEN CONTINUOUS AND SUFFICIENT ATTENTION. MOREOVER, THE COMMUNITIES SHOULD BE GIVEN MORE RESPONSIBILITIES IN TAKING DECISIONS ON CERTAIN ISSUES** (at the beginning of every month, we could discuss how to spend the money for spare time activities) or looking together for alternatives or solutions. We feel good every time we have a part in this.

WE WANT PUNISHMENTS TO BE PROPORTIONAL AND PERSONAL.

In an institution, we are also punished when we do something wrong. We think that is fair, but the punishment should be in proportion to what has happened and to the young person involved. **MOREOVER, PUNISHMENTS SHOULD BE USEFUL: WE COULD HELP TO REPAIR SOMETHING OR CLEAN UP.**

WE WANT TO BE INFORMED IN TIME WHENEVER THINGS WILL CHANGE.

In case of placement in an institution or moving from one institution to another, we want to be given more information in advance. At the moment this happens very quickly and the explanation only comes later.

WE WANT SUPERVISORS TO BE WELL-TRAINED. We think it is important that our supervisors in the institution are well-trained. Every day they have to deal with young people, who ended up there due to a difficult home situation.

TO US, GOOD SUPERVISORS SHOULD: LISTEN REALLY WELL, BE CREATIVE, EMPATHIZE WITH US OR OUR SITUATION, UNDERSTAND US, HAVE RESPECT FOR US, COME TO WORK IN A CHEERFUL MOOD, BE PEOPLE WE CAN TRUST AND WHO DO NOT BETRAY OUR TRUST.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



PART II

UNICEF BELGIUM
WHAT DO
YOU THINK?

OUR SENTENCE... THE VOICE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW

1 THE BEGINNING

*JUDGES DON'T GIVE US ANY CHOICE...
THEY DON'T TELL US ANYTHING ABOUT OUR RIGHTS...*

THE POLICE

WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION OF BEING INSPECTED TOO OFTEN BY THE POLICE, WITHOUT ANY REASON AND ON A DISCRIMINATORY BASIS.

I live in an area with lots of Belgians, and I am the only one being inspected the whole time.

When you ask them why we are being inspected when we didn't do anything, they just say: "Shut up."

HANDCUFFS SHOULD BE THE EXCEPTION, NOT THE RULE.

When being brought before the judge, it isn't necessary to handcuff everybody. An exception can be made for those young people who try to escape, but not all youth have to be treated as criminals.

WE ASK THAT AN INDEPENDENT PERSON BE PRESENT DURING ALL POLICIE INTERROGATIONS.

I was arrested and forced to admit certain facts. They shouted and threatened to hit me. Someone who is not part of the police should be present at interrogations.

WE WANT TO BE TREATED WITH RESPECT BY ALL POLICE STAFF.

The police agent hit me, but nobody believes me except my mother. I was wounded. They should go through what we experienced.

THE LAWYER

WE WOULD LIKE TO BE DEFENDED BY LAWYERS OF OUR CHOICE, WHO TAKE OUR INTERESTS SERIOUSLY.

We want lawyers making a stand for us, listening and trying to understand us, in order to defend us as best as possible. We therefore think that lawyers defending young people should follow a course on dealing with young people and defending them properly.

The legal aid counsel often does not know your case and does not defend you at all. He usually just agrees with the judge's judgment.

I have already had eight lawyers.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
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ABOUT IT!**



THE JUVENILE JUDGE

WE WANT TO BE HEARD AND UNDERSTOOD BY THE JUDGE BEFORE HE TAKES HIS DECISION.

We want to tell the judge our own story, so that we can stress all the important elements.

When appearing in the juvenile court, the decision has already been made. Ten minutes after the judgment has been heard, we are already outside and on our way to the juvenile centre.

When I started speaking to explain my situation, I had the feeling they did not believe me because of their distrustful looks. I felt my words were not believed, now I don't want to say anything anymore, they don't listen anyway.

WE THINK THERE ARE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE JUDGES, AND WE WOULD LIKE TO COUNT ON INDEPENDENT AND OBJECTIVE JUDGES.

Some judges explain everything better. Some are tougher than others...it all depends on who takes care of your case.

My lawyer told me to wear something decent, and take my earrings out. If that is necessary for court, the judge is not objective.

INFORMATION

I did not know that being heard was a fundamental right...

WE WANT TO BE INFORMED BETTER ON OUR RIGHTS AND WHAT WE ARE TO EXPECT.

We want to understand what is said by the police, lawyers, judges, consultants,... We want clear information which is tailored to our needs. This communication has to be clear for us, but also for the people near to us (our parents, people at school, maybe our friends,...).

We want to gain a clear insight into our case and into the functioning of justice in general, as well as into the different phases we go through: what is done and what lies ahead, which people will we be in contact with...

We want clarity about finding help, lawyers, etc...

When the judge decides to place us, he doesn't ask our opinion, he doesn't explain to us what the possibilities are or why he took that decision.

A lot of young people do not know what their future looks like, when they will be dismissed, where they will go to. Having to wait is sometimes unbearable.

THE DECISION

Did the judge make the right decision? We have our own opinion about this.

It is difficult being far away from your family. We spend more time with people we don't know than with our own family. When you then return to your family, you don't have the same mentality any more.

If I had to pick my own sentence, I would choose to do community service, or working at a project or something like that. In that way problems are addressed that should be addressed. You don't learn anything by just sitting here.

Placed in care to help? Or placed in care to punish? A few impressions.

I have to take responsibility for my blunders and be punished.

It is normal to be placed in care for serious offences, so that you can think about what you have done.

Being placed in care should be a kind of help. Institutions should help you stand on your own legs.

2 LIFE DURING THE TIME IN CARE

*THEY SEND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM CENTRE TO CENTRE...
HOPING THAT WE EVENTUALLY FALL INTO LINE ...*

THE CHOICE OF THE CENTRE

WE DON'T WANT TO MOVE FROM ONE CENTRE TO ANOTHER CONSTANTLY.

I have stayed in seven different centres during the past two years. There was no apparent change in my behaviour, so they transferred me.

Instead of sending us from one place to another, it would be better to let us stay in one centre. We need time to adapt.

WE WANT TO BE SENT TO A CENTRE ADAPTED TO OUR SPECIFIC SITUATION.

They had to find a drug rehabilitation centre for me. They couldn't find any, so sent me to centre A. They could not help me with my drug problem there, so I relapsed and fell by the wayside.

Guys with serious problems are placed here. However, they don't get the professional help they need, but are left to fend for themselves because helpers miss the psychiatric training.

Some of them did not commit any offence. They just sit here because there is no room anywhere else.

WE WANT DETENTION TO BE EXCLUDED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

We think that young people under 16 years of age should not be detained, and certainly not in a prison. We therefore don't like the news about opening juvenile prisons.

When detained, you get worse, not better.

RULES AND DISCIPLINE

There are rules, and when you don't respect them, you get punished: you don't get your weekend break, you have to go to your room, to the isolation cell...

MANY OF US EXPERIENCE THE ISOLATION PRACTICES AS BAD TREATMENTS.

The mattress is confiscated during the daytime, you have to sit on a hard chair. You can barely talk to anyone and become crazy in the head. It does not even help. You get angrier and are not allowed to express your anger, because then you end up in your cell again.

THE EDUCATORS

WE WANT EDUCATORS HELPING AND LISTENING TO US.

Some educators laugh at us for our problems. I think educators should listen and pay more attention to our problems.

Some educators think I've been sentenced, and treat me as a detainee. Some help us, but certainly not everyone or every time.

SCHOOL

WE WANT TO CONTINUE OUR SCHOOLING NORMALLY DURING OUR PLACEMENT.

We get education, but most of the time it is very different to the education we get in a real school. For most of us it is occupational therapy. You don't get any certificates or diplomas.

A lot of us have to repeat the year because of the time spent in care. It discourages us, we have to lower our level and we become eighteen without any qualifications.

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

WE WANT TO HAVE ACCESS TO GOOD QUALITY MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE.

Sometimes medication is compulsory, just to keep young people 'calm'. then they usually walk around like zombies; is that proving care?

WE WANT TO LIVE IN CLEAN BUILDINGS.

I think the hygiene is very bad. The toilets and showers are filthy; you can see mould on the walls.

RESPECTING PRIVACY

WE WANT MORE RESPECT FOR OUR PRIVATE LIFE ...

... DURING THE INSPECTIONS AFTER OUTINGS: WE DON'T WANT TO TAKE OUR CLOTHES OFF OR SHOWER OR PEE IN FRONT OF THE CENTRE'S STAFF.

When we arrive, it is not nice having to take your clothes off and empty all your pockets, even your socks and underpants. It is normal because a lot is being smuggled in, but the way it's done is exaggerated.

I was in centre B and don't have a single good memory. You get in there and have to stand naked in front of female supervisors.

... IN OUR ROOMS, IN THE TOILETS, ...

There is a little window in our room door. They can look through it anytime. They also don't always have the politeness to knock before coming in. In the summer for example, when you are in bed without any clothes on and the music is too loud, they just come in. That is annoying.

There are no locks on our toilets or on the shower.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



... IN OUR CONTACTS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD (E.G. VISITS, POST, PHONE CALLS).

What is problematic to me, is that there is always an educator present when we make a phone call. Letters are checked by the supervisors.

CONTACTS

ACTIVITIES, VISITS AND FRIENDSHIPS ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO US AND HAVE TO BE SIMPLIFIED.

The day is endless, it is always the same. You get up in the morning, study, and then go to your room until 4pm.

Internal contacts are also hindered. Friendship is difficult, you cannot exchange numbers.

There are no clear directions about who you can visit, the juvenile judge decides.

3 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

*WILL WE GET OUT OF THIS VICIOUS CIRCLE?
HOW DO WE GET OUT OF THIS?*

WE ASK FOR MORE SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE, BEFORE AND AFTER OUR RELEASE. FINDING A JOB, A PLACE TO LIVE, INDEPENDENCE...GETTING 'INTEGRATED' AGAIN: THE FUTURE IS FULL OF CHALLENGES WHEN OUR PLACEMENT IS ENDS OR WHEN WE BECOME OF AGE. WE WANT TO FEEL READY, TO HAVE THE FEELING WE GET A REAL CHANCE OF GETTING OUT OF THIS.

In centre D you learn to integrate yourself into daily life again. You are progressively allowed to go out on your own. When you get out of the centre, you can have plans, a new school, independence,...

At our place they don't do anything, they just allow us to go home during the last weekend of the month. Apart from that, we just 'wait': that's all I've been hearing for the last three months.

The waiting lists for 'guided independent living' are getting longer: some young people have to wait for months or longer than half a year to get help. Having neither certainty nor information about the future is unbearable.

THIS IS WHAT WE THINK ABOUT IT!

WE ASK TO BE TREATED WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION AND IN A WAY ADAPTED TO OUR AGE AND SPECIFIC PROBLEMS DURING EACH PHASE - BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE PLACEMENT. WE WANT TO BE INFORMED AND UNDERSTOOD, AND WANT OUR RIGHTS TO BE RESPECTED SO THAT A PLACEMENT BECOMES REAL HELP AND DOES NOT LIMIT OUR CHANCES FOR THE FUTURE.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



“WE, NON-ACCOMPANIED
FOREIGN MINORS...”

NON-ACCOMPANIED FOREIGN MINORS ON THE RESPECT FOR THEIR RIGHTS

1 WE ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST CHILDREN

Apart from being foreigners we are first and foremost children in a difficult situation.

WE WANT TO LIVE, STUDY AND GROW UP LIKE OTHER CHILDREN, WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION. WE THINK IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO BE TREATED AS CHILDREN AND NOT AS ADULTS.

WE ASK TO GIVE OUR OPINION AND TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DECISIONS CONCERNING US. WE ALSO ASK FOR INFORMATION ADAPTED TO OUR AGE AND OUR EXPERIENCES, ON ALL LEVELS, STARTING FROM OUR ARRIVAL IN BELGIUM.

2 THE ASYLUM PROCEDURE

WE ASK FOR A SHORT AND CLEAR ASYLUM PROCEDURE ADAPTED TO OUR AGE, OUR EXPERIENCES AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AS STATED IN THE CHILD RIGHTS CONVENTION.

WE ALSO WANT BETTER GUIDANCE AND A BETTER RECEPTION AT OUR ARRIVAL IN ORDER TO SIMPLIFY OUR INTEGRATION.

The greatest problem is that we don't know what is going to happen. We are either ill-informed or not informed at all about the course of the procedure. The uncertainty has an impact on our health, our feelings and our school results. We are always worried.

WE ASK FOR THE APPLICATION OF CUSTODY FROM THE BEGINNING, A BETTER COORDINATION BETWEEN THE FOREIGN OFFICE AND THE RECEPTION CENTRE.

WE WANT THE INTERVIEWS TO BE ADAPTED TO OUR AGE AND OUR EXPERIENCES; WE WANT TIME TO CATCH OUR BREATH IN BETWEEN OUR ARRIVAL AND OUR FIRST INTERVIEW AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE, AND WE WANT GUIDANCE DURING THIS INTERVIEW.

During our visits to the Foreign Office and to the Commissariat for Refugees and Stateless Persons we have to answer all kinds of questions: we have to tell about our lives, the painful situations we went through, the political situation in our country. But we don't always know the answers to the questions asked and feel like they think we're lying.

I went to the Foreign Office. The reception was not very good. They asked me lots of questions. I was intimidated. Worst of all: they don't believe you when you tell your story.

WE ASK THE ABOLITION OF AGE TESTS.

The age tests complicate the procedure even more. Some minors are considered adults by this test; what the young person tells or what is mentioned on his birth certificate is not always believed.

The fact that a bone scan is used to check someone's age seems inhuman to us. We often feel like we are no longer children, but a number, an adult, or someone without an identity.

WE WANT LAWYERS WITH BETTER TRAINING IN IMMIGRATION LAWS, AND WHO KNOW THE SPECIFIC PROBLEMS OF NON-ACCOMPANIED MINORS.

Lawyers are not always trained properly in immigration laws, and they do not always understand the situation very well. We sometimes feel that the lawyers do not make use of all the legal possibilities.

3 RECEPTION

WE ARE ASKING FOR A COMMON POLICY FOR ALL OPEN RECEPTION CENTRES. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT ALL CENTRES FOLLOW THE SAME RULES.

WE ARE ASKING FOR MORE MATERIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE CENTRES.

WE ALSO WANT SOME RESPECT FOR OUR PRIVATE LIVES.

There are huge discrepancies between the different open centres in Belgium. In some centres the social workers and social assistants do all they can to make the situation in the centre more humane and liveable.

In other centres the situation is completely different. The problem is that there are not enough people or resources. The infrastructure in the centres is dirty and badly maintained. There are not enough specialized employees. Sometimes young people are placed with adults. In some centres, there is very little space or no adapted infrastructure or privacy.

Life in the centre is not a normal one. We feel like we're living a phony existence.

WE WANT MORE TIME AND GUIDANCE TO INTEGRATE NEW YOUNG PEOPLE INTO THE CENTRES, AND A LIMITED NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE PER CENTRE.

Sometimes, when you are integrated somewhere, you have to move and start all over again, learn everything again. That is difficult!

WE WANT A BETTER DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE YOUNG PEOPLE TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS, AND MORE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CENTRE'S STAFF AND THE YOUNG PEOPLE.

There is a great lack of communication between the young people and the staff in the centre, and that leads to a lack of trust. We are for example worried about the reports they write about us: we want to know what is said about us and why these reports are written. In some centres there is a lot of tension between the young people, and the social workers do not always interfere. Some social workers have are also biased towards young people of a specific skin colour.

I have a very friendly social worker. All of them should get the same training and have the same passion for their profession.

4 SCHOOL

WE ARE ASKING FOR BETTER GUIDANCE AT SCHOOL AND ACCESS TO GOOD QUALITY EDUCATION.

We have enormous problems at school: there is a real lack of welcome, information and guidance. You have to find a school that will accept you. Children of asylum seekers do not always have access to all schools. In addition, they don't always let us choose what we want to study. They often put us in vocational or technical education. We don't agree with that.

WE ARE ASKING THAT THE BELGIAN POPULATION BE MADE AWARE OF OUR PROBLEMS.

We are discriminated against at school by the teachers and the pupils. We think it is because the Belgian population is not well informed about the situation of non-accompanied minors.

You have to educate the parents, not the children; the first ones who have to change are the adults.

WE ARE ASKING FOR INTENSIVE DUTCH OR FRENCH COURSES UPON OUR ARRIVAL AND BEFORE OUR ENROLMENT IN A SCHOOL.

We are also asking for extra language classes after school. Language is a problem for us. It is even bigger in Flanders, where there is an insufficient number of Dutch courses. Some teachers do not take the trouble to translate when we don't understand.

Why don't they send you to a French-speaking class immediately when you already speak some French? That would be easier for us!

WE ARE ASKING FOR MORE TRANSITION CLASSES AND MORE ATTENTION FOR CHILDREN WHO HAVE NOT YET BEEN TO SCHOOL IN THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN. WE ARE ALSO ASKING FOR A DIPLOMA EVALUATION SYSTEM ADAPTED TO WHAT WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH AS NON-ACCOMPANIED MINORS.

Some young people were forced to stay away from school in their country of origin. Other children have simply never been to school in their country of origin. For those having been to school, the major problem is they left their country without bringing their diplomas with them.

When you don't have the papers proving that you followed this or that direction or stating that you completed that grade in your country, you have to start from scratch. They don't believe you. They should help us to adapt to our school career, so that we can easily continue our education.

WE WANT MORE SOCIAL HELP FOR SCHOOL COSTS, AND WE WANT TO CONTINUE OUR STUDIES AFTER HAVING BECOME OF AGE.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



5 HEALTH

WE ASK FOR GOOD QUALITY HEALTH CARE AND MORE RESOURCES FOR THE CENTRES. AT LEAST ONE VISIT TO THE DENTIST PER YEAR, AND A VISIT TO AN OPTICIAN. THOSE WHO DON'T SEE WELL SHOULD RECEIVE A PAIR OF GLASSES.

Doctors are present in the centres, but they don't explain the illnesses very well and don't really listen. We only get paracetamol and are not redirected to a specialist.

Doctors in the centre only look at your eyes and give you medicine. They rarely properly examine young people to see which illness they have.

WE WANT BETTER INFORMATION ABOUT ILLNESSES AND ABOUT OUR HEALTH IN A LANGUAGE ADAPTED TO OUR AGE, AND THIS WITHIN A REASONABLE TIME FRAME.

We get no or very little information about our health. Especially the girls are not informed about contraceptives, visits to the gynaecologist, pregnancy and methods of abortion.

WE WANT A PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE NETWORK FOR NON-ACCOMPANIED MINORS ARRIVING ON THE TERRITORY, SO THAT THEY CAN ASK A CONFIDANT OUTSIDE THE CENTRE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP TO DEAL WITH THEIR TRAUMAS AND FEARS.

6 TUTELAGE²

WE WANT AN INDEPENDENT TUTOR, WHO KNOWS THE PROBLEMS THAT NON-ACCOMPANIED MINORS HAVE AND WILL GIVE US ADVICE AND INFORMATION, AND LISTEN TO US.

We think there are big differences between the tutors. Some of them do a fine job and give a lot of themselves. Others however do not keep good track of our case or do not have enough time for us. We think that one of the causes may be that some tutors are busy with too many young people at the same time.

I rarely see my tutor. He has appointments all the time.

There also sometimes is a lack of confidence between the tutor and us. Some tutors don't want to sign some important documents for us - to open a bank account for example, or to rent a house. In addition, some of us feel that the tutors don't defend us and more easily believe adults than us.

When we are not satisfied, we want to change tutors, but don't always know how to do that.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



² When the report "What do non-accompanied foreign minors think about it?" was published, the law of 24 December 2002 concerning the tutelage of non-accompanied foreign minors had not yet come into effect. In their report, the non-accompanied minors participating in the What do you think? project had expressed their hopes and described the 'ideal tutor.' Some time thereafter, on 1 May 2004, the new law concerning the tutelage of non-accompanied minors came into effect and the tutor system was adopted. UNICEF Belgium collected the impression of about fifteen young non-accompanied minors about the tutelage during a meeting in July 2009.

7 AFTER 18?

This is a transitional period that is not easy for us: we have to live alone, pay for our own studies, etc. Being 18 means undertaking a lot of actions and doing difficult things, and we are not ready for this. We are not prepared for it and suddenly have to manage without protection.

We are afraid and suddenly feel the threat of being expelled out of the country. It is difficult to stay within legal boundaries and prepare for your future in these conditions.

THIS IS WHAT WE THINK ABOUT IT!

WHEN ARRIVING IN BELGIUM, WE HAD TO DO WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF A FAMILY AND CONSTANTLY HAD TO FACE INCOMPREHENSION AND HUMILIATION. WE ARE ASKING FIRSTLY FOR RESPECT, BUT ALSO FOR INFORMATION, A GOOD WELCOME AND A PROCEDURE ADAPTED TO OUR AGE AND EXPERIENCE.

THE PROBLEMS WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH CONCERN A LOT OF MINISTERS, AND WE ASK THEM TO PURSUE A COORDINATED POLICY AND TOGETHER THINK OF AN IMPROVEMENT OF OUR SITUATION. WE HOPE OUR IDEAS WILL BE HEARD BY THE ADULTS AND CHILDREN IN BELGIUM AND THAT WE CAN WORK HAND IN HAND IN ORDER TO CHANGE THINGS.

“WE ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST CHILDREN” CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY ON THE RESPECT FOR THEIR RIGHTS

1 WE ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST CHILDREN

We don't like it when people see us as handicapped. We don't like that word. And we don't like it when people narrow us down to our disability.

A lot of people look at us, make remarks, protect us too much or underestimate us. That has to change!

We find it very important that people show interest for us as a person, and not as a disabled person.

We are especially faced with obstacles when we want to affirm our identity as a 'young person,' and when we indicate that we want to participate in activities of our age. Physical obstruction (access to playgrounds, pubs and clubs) and social obstruction, because other young people do not always want to play or be with us.

We like having fun, just like everyone else. It is sometimes enough just to give a small boost, show some understanding or tolerance.

2 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

It is good having equal rights, but when you don't have access to them, they are no use.

WE ASK FOR EQUAL RIGHTS IN OUR EDUCATION, AND IN PARTICULAR:

- Free school and study choices
- The end of the discrepancy between 'specialized' and 'normal' education.
- Choices being made based on fields of interest rather than on offer.
- An easy access to adapted material and the necessary support.
- Transferral possibilities to other education forms or to higher education.
- A good training in diversity for teachers
- Schools with a 'good atmosphere'

We want to talk about school. Some of us really like learning at school. Our school is sometimes far from where we live. We also think it's a pity if we have to learn a profession we don't like. Some of us like going to school with other young disabled people. Others prefer going to a normal school. But some of our teachers don't understand anything about our disabilities.

WE ALSO ASK FOR EQUAL RIGHTS REGARDING HOBBIES:

The activities have to be adapted and made accessible, so that everybody can participate.

The participation of young disabled people to all activities has to be encouraged.
We have to get better information about the possibilities of having hobbies.

I used to play djembe in a youth group, but that isn't possible anymore because they are afraid of me.

WE ASK FOR EQUAL RIGHTS IN SOCIETY. THERE HAS TO BE AN END TO THE INACCESSIBILITY IN THE BROAD SENSE OF THE WORD.

There is no space for wheelchairs in football stands. We always have to sit behind the goal.

WE ASK FOR EQUAL RIGHTS REGARDING MENTALITIES:

There has to be more attention for disabilities in the media; social barriers have to be removed; diversity and integration have to be encouraged.

We also wish to have equal rights at work: finding a balance between positive discrimination and exclusion; receiving more information about the possibilities for people and companies.

3 INFORMATION**WE DEMAND INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE TO ALL, AND TAILORED TO EVERYONE.**

We see a real lack of information on all levels. All the key players should be better informed: the general public, the young people, teachers, doctors, parents, ...
The gaps in this matter have numerous consequences and explain a lot of problems.

AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE SHOULD BE INFORMED ABOUT THE LIFE OF DISABLED PEOPLE, VIA TELEVISION, IN MOVIES AND PAPERS FOR EXAMPLE. Information has to be given about the subject, and not only about the medical aspect of it. There has to be a balance in the choice of the themes.

I don't know whether people are afraid of the unknown, or afraid of doing something wrong. Many are biased against people who are different. Regardless of whether they are different because of their shape, colour or disability.

TEACHERS SHOULD BE OBLIGED TO TALK ABOUT DISABILITIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS WITH THEIR PUPILS.**'MIXED AND/OR INTEGRATED ACTIVITIES HAVE TO BE SUPPORTED.**

'Mixed' activities are ideal to prove that you don't have to be afraid of a disability.

At the scouts I don't participate in the running, but I join in with the atmosphere and have fun with the others.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



TEACHERS, DOCTORS, ETC. SHOULD BE TRAINED BETTER TO BE ABLE TO DIAGNOSE DISABILITIES.

They also should be made aware of the problems linked to a disability.

OUR PARENTS SHOULD GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE DISABILITY OF THEIR CHILD, AND ABOUT THE POSSIBILITIES REGARDING THE EDUCATION AND HOBBIES. Parents should get more support, they often have many questions.

THE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD BE SIMPLIFIED AND THE COORDINATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT SERVICES SHOULD IMPROVE.

WE WOULD LIKE TO MAKE USE OF EASILY ACCESSIBLE AND ADAPTED INFORMATION ABOUT THEMES IMPORTANT TO US, about our rights and in the media.

As disabled children, we wish to be informed about the world around us, in order for us to be autonomous and less dependent. The new media (e-mail, internet) are a great help. It is important to us to be well trained so that we can use these in an independent way. The media do not make a lot of effort to help us.

There should be more interpreters on television. And more subtitles.

4 ADJUSTMENTS OF PUBLIC SPACES

There is a whole series of obstacles preventing us from participating in community life. These obstacles are not really attributed to our disability, but to bad adjustments of public spaces.

PUBLIC SPACES HAVE TO BE MADE MORE ACCESSIBLE: put inaccessible buildings on a black list and impose a fine to their owners; foresee slopes everywhere and in all public spaces; search for adapted measures for shops, pubs, cinemas, etc.; make information in public spaces accessible to everyone (announcements on the trains, alarms in lifts,...)

We think it's unfair not to be able to go everywhere in a wheelchair. We would also like everybody to be able to participate in all activities. The reaction of other people is sometimes a real obstacle to our integration. Many of us talk about the price of accessibility, others don't know what the possibilities are.

We feel like our freedom and independency are being limited. We always have to depend on someone else, because of maladjusted structures. They have to let us be free, we need some breathing space.

It is difficult for us to move around freely and take part in 'real' life. Everywhere we go, we come across obstacles. Public transport and all public space should be made more accessible for people with a reduced mobility. This would be better for everyone. Without access, it is difficult to integrate.

It's important to know that we'll be blocked as long as the infrastructure does not improve. It is of capital importance it is adjusted.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



5 OUR PARTICIPATION

AS YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY, WE THINK IT IS REALLY IMPORTANT THAT OUR OPINION IS ASKED AND THAT WE ARE LISTENED TO. OUR OPINION SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT.

Too many people think we are not intelligent enough to say what we think and what we would like to do. This means we are not respected. They see us as disabled and therefore as incapable.

It is not always easy for us to participate in decisions about ourselves. Too often, others still decide for us without asking for our opinion; whether it is in our family, at school, during our hobbies, in healthcare, in town councils or in politics. It is not always out of bad intentions; often people underestimate us or want to protect us too much.

We really have to be able to find our place in society. We would otherwise stay excluded and depend on others forever.

WE WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN DEFENDING OUR OWN RIGHTS!

We hope to contribute to the realization of a society properly adjusted to everyone. We are prepared to do our bit and help make the decisions which concern us.

BUT IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE, WE HAVE TO BE WELL INFORMED.

THIS IS WHAT WE THINK OF IT!

EACH OF US IS UNIQUE AND HAS THEIR OWN GOOD AND BAD POINTS. BUT WE STILL HAVE A LOT IN COMMON. A DISABILITY IS JUST ONE ASPECT OF OUR LIFE, AND IT IS NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE. WE LIKE THE SAME THINGS, FOLLOW THE SAME FASHION AND TRENDS, HAVE THE SAME DREAMS AS OUR PEERS.

WE DREAM OF THE FUTURE, WE DREAM OF A FAMILY. WE DREAM OF A WORLD WITHOUT WAR. WE WONDER WHERE WE WILL LIVE LATER ON. WE DREAM OF HOLIDAYS, A JOB,... BUT WE ALSO AND MOST OF ALL DREAM OF A WORLD ADJUSTED TO EVERYONE, WHERE WE WOULD ALSO FIND OUR PLACE AND GET THE SAME RIGHTS AS EVERYBODY ELSE.

WE ARE CONVINCED THAT A SOCIETY ADJUSTED TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY WOULD BE A BETTER SOCIETY FOR EVERYONE.

“MY HOSPITAL IN PENCIL”

THE HOSPITAL THROUGH THE EYES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1 HOSPITAL STAFF

WE THINK NURSES SHOULD GET MORE TIME .

The hospital staff - especially the nurses - do everything to make our stay as pleasant as possible. But we think it's a shame that there's not a lot of contact with the doctors.

The nurses are funny and reassure us.

Give them more time, so they can be with us.

Doctors are not present enough.

They should give us more attention, come by more often and be more patient.

2 VISITS

WE WANT TO BE AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO OUR PARENTS: WE WANT MORE VISITS AND MORE FLEXIBLE VISITING HOURS.

When you are in hospital, a visit is the nicest thing that you can get. It breaks the boredom. The visits from our parents are wonderful. Their presence during difficult times is of great support. We want our parents to visit us regularly. We would especially like our parents to spend the night with us, but also before and after the anesthesia, in more private facilities and during painful treatments.

We miss our parents: in our room, in the recovery room and the operation room.

Give us the possibility of seeing them more often.

The visiting hours should be longer.

But our parents should be able to stay with us, especially at night.

3 CARE AND TREATMENT

WE WANT THE CARE AND TREATMENTS TO BE TAILORED TO CHILDREN.

WE WOULD LIKE TO BE INFORMED BETTER ABOUT THE TREATMENTS, THE PAIN...AND WANT TO BE ABLE TO TALK ABOUT IT.

There is too little information about the treatments, the risks and side effects, and a lack of preparation at the reception, in a language adapted to us and to our parents. Sometimes the nurses, and not the doctors, give us the necessary information. We sometimes have to ask for the information ourselves. Being well informed, and being able to talk about the pain, can help to ease it. We however do not always make the decisions together with our parents or relative. Many of us can't talk about our experiences.

*Tell us what we have and whether it's going to hurt.
There should be specific and individual care for every child.*

*They didn't tell me anything. They just told me not to worry.
There are things I don't dare say when I'm in pain.*

WE WANT THE INJECTIONS TO STOP!

We are afraid of injections. They are necessary to recover; we know it's for our own good. But we want to be understood and heard when we are in pain and worry.

*The ideal hospital is a hospital without pain.
Think of something else other than injections.*

4 COMFORT

WE WANT TO FEEL AT HOME.

Although we are generally satisfied, there still are some points that have to be changed to make the space cosier and full of light.

THERE SHOULD BE PLANTS IN THE ROOM, AND THE ROOMS SHOULD BE DECORATED WITH VIVID COLOURS.

*A room with more colours.
Computers and free television for all children.
Animals should be allowed.
Services should be adapted to our age and our illness.*

MOST OF US DON'T LIKE TO BE ALONE IN A ROOM.

5 PLAYING AND SCHOOL

WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO PLAY!

Spending time with the nurses, looking at the clowns, taking part in activities and going to school: this way we get the chance to meet other people, keep a grip on reality and forget we are ill for a while.

WE WANT ACTIVITIES ADAPTED TO OUR AGE. WE THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP IN CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD, WITH OUR SCHOOL AND FRIENDS.

We sometimes have difficulties catching up when going back to school. We think it's fantastic when someone (friends, teacher, headteacher, parents, etc.) brings our homework to hospital and keeps in contact.

The computer is of great help: not only to keep ourselves busy, but to keep in contact with the outside world.

*Having fun in order to forget where you are.
Laughing with clowns, activities and games!
Playing outside: having a garden and being able to go outside.
Having a school in the hospital.*

I love classes, they make me forget the pain.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



THIS IS WHAT WE THINK ABOUT IT!

THE HOSPITAL IS OFTEN UNKNOWN TO US. WE FEEL PAIN AND FEAR. WE DON'T KNOW WHY WE HAVE TO GO THERE, OR FOR HOW LONG.

THE WORDS ADULTS USE ARE NOT ALWAYS ADJUSTED TO CHILDREN. WE HAVE TO LEAVE OUR FAMILY ENVIRONMENT, OUR MOM, DAD, BROTHERS, SISTERS AND FRIENDS. WE ARE OFTEN AFRAID OF THE OPERATIONS OR TREATMENTS WE HAVE TO GO THROUGH. WE ARE ALSO BORED. WE HAVE TO STAY IN BED AND THERE AREN'T MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO HAVE FUN. WE ARE AFRAID OF INJECTIONS AND PAIN.

LUCKILY, NOT ALL OUR EXPERIENCES ARE NEGATIVE. WE ALSO MAKE NEW FRIENDS, THE TREATMENTS ARE EFFICIENT, THE MEDICAL STAFF TREATS US WITH THE BEST CARE AND A LOT OF FRIENDLINESS. LATER ON, WE CAN BE PROUD OF THE PROBLEMS WE DEFEATED.

THIS IS WHAT WE THINK ABOUT IT!



“STOP THE SORROW” WHAT DO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES THINK?

STOP THE SORROW, THE DESPAIR AND THE CONFINEMENT.
WE MISS OUR PARENTS, WE WANT TO SEE THEM MORE OFTEN.
STOP THE INJECTIONS!
WHY ARE WE HERE AND FOR HOW LONG?
WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW.

1 BEFORE ADMISSION

WE DON'T WANT A WAITING PERIOD FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BE ADMITTED.

I wanted to be admitted. It was very difficult, I had to wait for three or four months. In the meantime I did not go to school, that was hard.

WE ASK FOR REAL PARTICIPATION WHEN DECIDING ABOUT ADMISSION.

We are often admitted against our will. We sometimes proposed an alternative (staying at a brother's or relative's place for a while for example), but they weren't considered. We are asking for alternatives to admission in psychiatric services for those who need it.

I didn't have anything to say about the admission. The psychologist and my parents decided on my behalf. I was present when the decision was made, but my opinion was not taken into account.

They sometimes intern us in a psychiatric hospital when there's no room anywhere else.

WE ASK FOR MORE AND BETTER INFORMATION ABOUT THE K-SERVICES AND ABOUT OUR TREATMENTS.

They don't properly explain where you are going to and what it means.

2 LIFE DURING ADMISSION

THE STAFF

WE WANT MORE TRAINED AND MOTIVATED STAFF.

We only have one social worker for the whole service (20 girls and 40 boys). All other staff are women. For a boy, that's not very easy.

INFORMATION AND PARTICIPATION

IT'S NOT ALWAYS CLEAR WHY CERTAIN RULES EXIST. WE WANT THE NECESSITY OF SOME OF THE RULES TO BE DISCUSSED MORE AND WANT TO BE MORE INVOLVED WHEN THE RULES ARE DRAWN UP.

WE WANT TO BE ABLE TO GIVE OUR OPINION ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES, SCHOOL, AND THE LIFE IN THE CENTRE. WE WANT MORE PARTICIPATION IN DAILY LIFE.

Most things are decided above our heads. For smaller things we can decide. Leave is, for example, discussable.

We have a group meeting, but it's not taken into account. The supervisors always say "we'll talk about it," but we don't get an answer.

We would like to give our opinion about the life in hospital, but we can't change anything anymore.

TREATMENT AND MEDICATION

WE WANT LESS MEDICATION.

WE WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR TREATMENT, LIKE THE MEDICATION WE GET AND OUR DISCHARGE DATE.

They have to take the time to explain to the young person what the treatment consists of, and to talk it over with him or her.

My opinion is not taken into account. I had to take more medication, but I did not know why. I asked why, and they answered "in order for you to feel good." I said the medication did not help, but they did not stop it.

In our centre, you can say whenever you want to stop the medication, but it has to be discussed by all the therapists and group leader before it's allowed.

There is always a therapist present in our centre, and they explain why the treatment is necessary. Parents have something to say too.

CONTACTS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

WE WANT MORE CONTACT: MORE CONTACT WITH EACH OTHER, AND WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD. (OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS). WE DON'T ALWAYS UNDERSTAND WHY THE RULES ARE SO STRICT ABOUT CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

At first I was staying in another hospital. We were so overprotected that I was scared when I left.

I have been here for one and a half years without any contact with my friends. When I get out, I won't have any friends anymore.

We feel locked up here.

I'm fed up because it's hard to stay here. I would like to go home.

I want to be free and live with my mother.

PRIVACY

WE ASK FOR MORE PRIVACY.

When you live in a group the whole day long, it is sometimes difficult to be 4 in a room in the evening. We would like some more privacy.

It seems like the social workers have to know everything all the time. When you laugh, they ask why. But it not the social worker's business.

Everything is written down. We are checked very often.

...body contact is forbidden, we get punished for it...

ACTIVITIES

WE WANT MORE RECREATION ACTIVITIES, ALSO OUTSIDE THE K-SERVICE.

You can go crazy because of the monotony. The hospital is like a long monotonous corridor. It's too repetitive. There are not enough excursions.

SCHOOL

WE WANT MORE EDUCATION FOR THOSE WHO WANT IT AND ARE UP TO IT.

WE WANT THE NUMBER OF CLASSES TO BE EVALUATED SEPERATELY FOR EACH YOUNG PERSON.

For some of us, it's better to have fewer classes (to concentrate fully on therapy), for others it's better to have more classes (otherwise we risk lagging behind at school). We don't want this to be a standard package any longer, but determined for each person separately.

When you stay in a psychiatric hospital, you often lose a year.

You don't feel well, so it's hard to concentrate at school, you have to determine your priorities. You first have to recover fully.

I think that more classes should be possible for those who want them.

THE CENTRE

WE WANT AN AGREABLE CENTRE TO LIVE IN, IN A GREEN ENVIRONMENT, WITH MORE COLOURS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF PLAYING AND LEARNING.

What is negative in all hospitals is the odour (it stinks), the depressing corridors, the lack of infrastructure and resources, [...] being packed together, the lack of privacy when there is no private sanitary.

The windows are covered with plastic in our room. We can't look outside, we don't get any sunlight in. I would like to have contact with the others and get some fresh air, I think that's very important. I don't want any plastic on the windows.

There are bars in front of our windows.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



WHEN IT GOES TOO FAR ...

WE WANT CLEAR RULES ABOUT ISOLATION (WHEN, WHY, HOW LONG) AND THEY SHOULD BE EXPLAINED TO US AT THE BEGINNING OF OUR ADMISSION.

LIMITING OUR FREEDOM (BY ISOLATING US OR BINDING US TO OUR BED FOR EXAMPLE) CAN ONLY BE USED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND ONLY TO PROTECT OURSELVES OR THE OTHERS (NOT TO PUNISH US). OTHER SANCTIONARY MEASURES CAN BE TAKEN.

When it gets too bad, they just knock us out with some injections. That's not normal.

We are tied to our bed. All trust is lost then.

For the slightest thing, we are sent to isolation cell. When we tense up, they call the men and bring us to the isolation cell. They keep us there for too long. The cell is locked and stinks.

I once had to stay for one and a half weeks in the isolation cell, but there was one person who had to stay there for one and a half months.

They force us to take medication before going to the isolation cell. That is really like a jail with a urinal.

We very rarely have to go to the isolation cell.

We have a room where you can kick a ball against the wall to let off steam.

3 THE END

IT'S VERY HARD BECAUSE WE OFTEN DON'T KNOW WHEN WE CAN LEAVE THE K-SERVICES. THIS UNCERTAINTY RANKLES. THE COMMUNICATION ABOUT THIS HAS TO IMPROVE.

We are living in uncertainty; you know when you get in, but never when you will get out. The discharge dates are not always respected.

Some have been here for two or three years and don't know how much longer they are staying.

You often have to stay longer in hospital because there is not enough space in juvenile reception centres. It can take months to find a place where you feel happy.

4 AND IN THE MEANTIME THE WORLD GOES ON TURNING

THE OUTSIDE WORLD OFTEN HAS THE WRONG IMPRESSION ABOUT WHAT PSYCHIATRY IS AND DOES.

WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH INCOMPREHENSION AND CONTEMPT.

WE WANT TO BE STIGMATIZED LESS. THE IMAGE OF PSYCHIATRY HAS TO CHANGE.

They think we are crazy.

I tried to explain it at school, but they don't understand it, they think we're lunatics in straitjackets.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



They look at us strangely on the street, at the bus stop. Then we are called names: there are the institution kids. They once threw a pile of egg at us. That is not normal, we are human beings too, aren't we? In the end we are the same people, we are just going through a difficult period.

A documentary showing how we live, like documentaries about poor countries. That they would show in all schools.

THIS IS WHAT WE THINK ABOUT IT!

WE ASK FOR MORE ATTENTION FOR CHILDREN IN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS. THE FULFILMENT OF MOST OF OUR RECOMMENDATIONS WOULDN'T COST ANY MONEY. IT'S ABOUT A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE, THE WAY WE ARE TREATED. WE WANT SOME RESPECT AND ENOUGH INFORMATION ABOUT THE RULES, THE TREATMENT (AND NOT ONLY THE MEDICAL ONES), THE ALTERNATIVES TO INTERNMENT AND ESPECIALLY INFORMATION TO HELP US UNDERSTAND WHY. THE ROLE OF OUR GUIDANCE (NOT ONLY THE PSYCHIATRIST) IS CRUCIAL.

**THIS IS
WHAT WE
THINK
ABOUT IT!**



What do you think?



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**THE VOICE
OF CHILDREN
CAN CHANGE
THE WORLD.
MAKE IT HEARD!**