



Final report Emergency Fund vulnerable children

**the Netherlands in response to the
COVID-19 pandemic**

December 2020

What & how

The Covid-19 pandemic

When, in March 2020, the corona Emergency started and all schools closed, a large group of vulnerable children were in danger of being particularly affected. Not only children living in a family with a youth protection measure, but also children in the homeless- or women's-shelter, the asylum seeker centres, foster care were locked up in a vulnerable situation for weeks. Everything stopped, school, contact with care takers as well as social contacts. For example, children in the shelters and asylum seeker centres were barely allowed to leave their rooms, foster children could not visit their biological parents and children with a youth protection measure were missing that one place where they could escape the problems at home, school.



Something had to be done

Augeo Foundation, Stichting Kinderpostzegels and Stichting Het Vergeten Kind decided overnight to create a special Emergency Fund. With this fund they wanted to offer vulnerable children something to soften the lockdown period and reduce stress. Because vulnerable children and their families regularly lack the things they need to learn at home, to relax or to have online contact with their peers, a model with vouchers was chosen. Family guardians or foster care workers could apply for vouchers on the website www.kwetsbaarhuis.nl, which made it possible to purchase goods that were most needed by each child.



A flying start

The three initiators, who themselves invested EUR 250,000, approached a large number of funds to participate in the Emergency Fund. Within a short period of time, about 35 funds joined, with a joint contribution of one and a half million euros.

A temporary project and steering group set up the application procedure, arranged the assessment of the applications and brought the Emergency Fund to the attention of youth protection organisations, foster parent organisations, family home parents and shelters. All applications were closely monitored from the outset in order to keep a finger on the pulse: did the fund meet the right needs?



Phase 1 (March-June): games and leisure equipment to get through isolation

In the first period in which the Emergency Fund operated, youth workers could get vouchers from Bol.com (a Dutch Amazon type of internet shop) of 50 euros per child, with a maximum of 100 euros per family or 250 euros per (living) group. With the vouchers, the care workers, in consultation with the children and families, purchased materials to keep children busy during the isolation period: books, board games, active toys, headphones, sports equipment and educational computer games. Some more expensive items were purchased together for a group of children, such as a trampoline, an inflatable swimming pool or - for online education - a laptop, chrome book or tablet. From mid-May onwards, schools and childcare organisations could also apply for vouchers for children they were worried about.

Phase 2 (June-September): shift of emphasis towards activities

Aid workers shared their concerns with the Emergency fund about the upcoming summer holidays: another period in which vulnerable children would have few options. It was decided to shift the emphasis from the purchase of (educational) materials to relaxing activities. This time the Emergency Fund provided 'plumes'; vouchers for days out, cinema, zoo and other experiences, supplemented with Intertoys vouchers for toys. Summer camps, outings and activity days were also organised by the Emergency Fund and its partners.

Effect

What has been achieved and what have we learned?

Almost 50% of the target group were reached

In total, the vulnerable target group of the Emergency Fund consists of 90,000 children. The first objective, reaching out to 20,000 vulnerable children, could soon be adjusted, thanks to the enthusiasm of both funds and youth workers. Already in the first ten days 6,000 vouchers were issued.

In the phase up to the summer, the Emergency Fund approved about 10,000 applications, reaching a total of over 35,000 children. Most applications came from the youth protection sector, followed by foster care, youth care, residential youth care institutions, family homes and organisations for the disabled.

During the second phase, in the summer and beyond, the Emergency Fund reached another 8,000 children with vouchers and activities. In total, almost half of the target group was reached.

Impact phase 1 - partial lockdown: major diversion

In June, at the request of the Emergency Fund, the Verwey-Jonker Institute started researching the significance of the fund for participating children and families¹. The care workers who made an application to the fund, were asked to complete a questionnaire. More than 50% of the almost 3,500 care workers who applied for vouchers in the first phase returned the questionnaire. This is an enormous response and demonstrates the great commitment of the field.

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The researchers conclude that it has been possible to reach the children who were most in need of help from the Emergency Fund. At the time of application to the Emergency Fund, the children were facing various problems. In almost 90% of the applications there was a lot of stress, in almost as many cases there were children's behavioural problems. Other frequently mentioned problems are poverty, behavioural or psychological problems of one of the parents, but also psychological problems of children. Many children also had school arrears. The lockdown exacerbated the problems that were already there. There was also a lot of loneliness: more than half of the children in institutions had to miss their parents, brothers or sisters for a longer period of time, and visits of foster children to biological parents were also halted.

The vouchers, which were described by care workers as a ray of hope in a difficult situation, distracted from the stress; they helped children in an institution, shelter or asylum seeker centre to get out of their isolation.

¹A summary of the report with an overview of the impact achieved, conclusions and recommendations can be found at the end of the report.

The vouchers gave children a sense of visibility and appreciation. As the Verwey-Jonker concludes: 'The children have the feeling: someone is thinking of me. That is almost more important than the gift itself'. Parents and foster parents felt supported and relieved. In addition, the gift moment helped to consolidate the relationship between family and care worker, and to create a positive moment within the family. The assessment of the needs of the children and the families was done by the youth care workers. This proved to work really well.

Care workers, as mentioned earlier, said they were worried about the summer holidays, another long uninterrupted time in an often unsafe home. This was the reason for the Emergency fund to adjust the offer for the summer holidays.

Impact phase 2 - the summer holidays: intensified link

All partners have reported that the activities they have organised during the summer period have had a very positive impact on the children. Often it was the only distraction in a period immediately following the heavy lockdown period. A wide variety of activities were organised throughout the country; from outings and amusement park visits to holiday weeks and workshops focusing on talent and language development.

To name a few examples:

- TeamUp organised extra activities in AZCs such as workshops or clinics,
- the Nidos Foundation organised outings for unaccompanied minor refugees,
- Foster care workers did the same for network foster families and mentors/mates ensured that contact between them and the children remained good during the summer thanks to the outings.
- And, through youth protection workers, pledges were made to families with a youth protection measure.

When organising activities, much attention was paid to the wishes of the children and young people themselves.



The most important effects of the summer activities are: a better bond between care worker and child, more cohesion within the groups, better language development and gaining of new experiences, such as going to a museum, cinema or amusement park for the first time. The care workers also felt better able to keep a finger on the pulse of 'their' children.

How to proceed from here?

Complementary qualities

The three funds at the cradle of the Emergency Fund welcome their unique cooperation. What unites them is the attention they give to children who are in trouble at home for a variety of reasons. Expertise, professional networks and organisational qualities complement each other in a beautiful way: **Stichting Kinderpostzegels** with its programmes offering development opportunities to a large numbers of children growing up in a wide variety of situations, **Augeo Foundation** with online education and support of professionals to tackle child abuse and domestic violence and **Stichting Het Vergeten Kind** with its programmes that ensure that children can be child again through a day out or a short holiday.

The power of cooperation

Because events demanded rapid action, practical and substantive differences between the three funds that normally could have stand in the way of progress were set aside. In times of Emergency, the three partners have proven to be able to react quickly, work well together and enjoy a great deal of trust from care workers, donors and funds. This partnership had an accelerator effect, with much greater reach than they had dared to dream of at the start.

This way, an emergency fund worth one and a half million euros was set up in a pressure cooker. Almost simultaneously vouchers were distributed to the target group, while also listening carefully to the wishes of the children for whom it all started. The experience of the Emergency Fund might be a starting point for more and closer cooperation in the fragmented charity world in the Netherlands. In any case, this cooperation tastes for more. Both care workers and donors of the Emergency Fund are enthusiastic.



Lessons learned

Thanks to its direct relationship with care workers, the Emergency Fund was well placed to reach its target group. The insight that small financial support in an emergency is of great and lasting value to parents and children is also valuable.

There are also lessons to be learned. We had a flying start and in hindsight we should have thought from day one about what to do in a possible next phase - total lock down, partly back to school and/or the summer holidays. And although a crisis cannot be planned, it would be fantastic if the Emergency Fund could involve children even more in organising aid.

Future

A more permanent focus on the situation of vulnerable children is not a superfluous luxury when we consider that the impact of the coronary measures - the closure of schools, the interruptions in aid, the loss of family contacts and structure - on the lives of this group will only become apparent in the long term. Network foster families in particular need more support. Kinderpostzegels is considering setting up a summer activities fund: with a relatively low amount of money it will invest in a leisure experiences for children and their development helping the relationship within families and between family and care worker. Het Vergeten Kind is busy setting up an expansion of its 'coronaproof' aid offer, making use of its large group of involved volunteers and corporate network, such as a packs to promote contact between children who have been placed away from home and their network. Augeo Foundation plans to support twice a year a group of 1,000 children with a youth protection measure through the Emergency Fund network.



Making a difference

The three funds will be able to find each other in the event of a new school closure. As they did in March, they will then reassess what is most needed at that time. Because, as has become clear: The Emergency Fund can make a difference in emergency situations.

Infographic

Summary by Verwey-Jonker Instituut

June 2020

CRISIS FUND FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AT HOME



The 'Crisis Fund for Vulnerable Children at Home' was set up to support vulnerable children during the corona crisis. It aimed to reduce the stress of the lockdown by offering opportunities to learn and play.

How? Social workers* could apply for vouchers to buy goods for the children.

VOUCHER

Nearly 35,000 children received support through the Crisis Fund. 1,600 social workers participated in the research into the impact the support had on the children. The findings presented in this infographic are based on their answers.



*The social workers include those working in youth protection, foster care, youth care, family homes, women's shelters and social care, neighbourhood teams, schools, childcare and crisis care.

FOR WHICH CHILDREN?



Children living at home with a youth protection measure or with involvement of 'Veilig Thuis' (Safe Home)



Children in family homes, institutions and foster homes



Children in social or women's shelters and refugee centres

IMPACT OF THE CRISIS ON VULNERABLE CHILDREN

WHY SPECIFICALLY FOR THESE CHILDREN?

These vulnerable children already had multiple issues. These problems have often worsened, or additional problems have arisen.

Before corona, vulnerable children experienced:

- 85% Behavioural problems
- 69% Mental health problems
- 68% Poverty
- 67% Parents with mental health problems
- 63% Stress in the family

During corona, these children experienced:

- 46% Increased behavioural problems
- 31% Increased mental health problems
- 16% Increased poverty
- 23% Parents with increased mental health problems
- 48% Increased stress in the family

According to social workers, there are often multiple problems within a family.

SOCIAL WORKERS INDICATE THAT MANY VULNERABLE CHILDREN HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY THE CORONA CRISIS:



- more stress (irritation, inability to release energy, insecurity, difficulty dealing with emotions)
- reduction in or changes to existing support (for example, no more day care)
- problems due to the lack of activities, assistance and social support
- issues with home schooling (lack of materials or insufficient guidance).

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WHICH PROBLEMS AROSE DUE TO THE LACK OF ACTIVITIES, HELP AND SOCIAL SUPPORT?

For vulnerable children in particular, school provides them stability – giving them structure and a place where they can feel safe. Not being able to attend school is therefore a big problem. The same applies to activities organised by institutions and care centres. Older children have trouble finding a part-time job. This increases boredom and they miss out on income.



Difficulty with changes and/or loss of structure

75%



Isolation: missing school, sports, family and friends

73%



Changes in the relation with one or both parents

40%



Contact with social worker(s) was difficult or stopped

32%



Informal help from the network was reduced or stopped altogether

75%



PROBLEMS DUE TO SCHOOLS BEING CLOSED:

Lack of materials for school and learning activities:
Insufficient or no guidance with schoolwork:
Educational disadvantage:

49%
45%
34%



“A brother and sister aged 9 and 10 years old who are being looked after by a guardian and are having a hard time at home are so happy now. A small pool and two boxes full of art supplies. A whole summer of fun and cooling off in the garden while their friends go on holiday or lie by the swimming pool. They can enjoy the summer like other kids! ”



TOP 3 POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS AS A RESULT OF THE CORONA CRISIS:

- 1 The family has more self-confidence and resilience/self-reliance than expected **30%**
- 2 The children appear to be more resilient and self-reliant **26%**
- 3 There is more frequent or more intensive contact with social worker(s) **23%**

TOP 3 THINGS THAT CHILDREN NEED:

- 1 Relaxation
- 2 Playing
- 3 Distraction



“A family with teenage children that has trouble having meaningful conversations chose some games to play that facilitated talking with each other. For these families, the attention they have received is really special. ”

THE IMPACT OF THE CRISIS FUND

WHAT HAS BEEN THE EFFECT OF THE VOUCHERS?

According to social workers, the items bought provide some welcome relief in the difficult situation the children find themselves in. Children feel that somebody's thinking about them, that they're seen and that they matter. That makes them feel good. The purchase of items has cheered children up for a while, so they experience less stress and tension as a result of the corona measures. In addition, it delivers a rewarding and positive moment of contact with the social worker.



Children experience less stress

54%



Children feel they're seen and appreciated

54%



Parents/social workers are unburdened and feel supported

37%



Positive contact moment with social worker

30%



Precious contact moment with family/friends

23%

WHAT KIND OF ITEMS WERE BOUGHT?



Toys (e.g. board games, inflatable pool)

59%



Art & craft supplies

55%



Educational materials, games and books

40%



Sports equipment (such as footballs, sneakers)

38%



Digital equipment for education (such as laptop, headphones)

11%

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

Summer HOLIDAYS

Social workers are concerned about the summer holidays. This is already a difficult period for vulnerable children (no school, less structure). Social workers expect it to be extra difficult this year.

TOP 3 EXPECTED PROBLEMS FOR THE SUMMER:

- 1 Difficulty with isolation, missing school, sports, friends
- 2 Difficulty in dealing with changes
- 3 Assistance of any form cannot be provided

51%
57%
49%

According to the social workers, there is still a need for relaxation, distraction, and positive contact with family and friends, especially during the summer holidays

TOP 5 THINGS NEEDED IN THE SHORT TERM:

- 1 Extra options to relax at home
- 2 A day of fun away from home
- 3 Playing in the neighbourhood with other children
- 4 A supervised family holiday
- 5 A holiday camp with peers

75%
74%
59%
38%
33%

Vulnerable children are struggling, and not only during the corona crisis and its aftermath. They always need your genuine and positive attention for their personal development.

The findings in this factsheet relate to children in all living situations mentioned earlier. The research report shows the findings for each group.

The Crisis Fund for Vulnerable Children at Home is an initiative of:





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