Introduction
The Dutch government plans a decentralisation of the Dutch youth care system that should be finished in 2015. Municipalities will become responsible for all services for children, young people and families. The youth care system should become more coherent, efficient and cost-effective and focus on prevention and the capacities of children, young people and parents. International exchange of knowledge may help Dutch policy makers and professionals to address these challenges. Therefore in September 2012 the Netherlands Youth Institute brought together an international review team to visit two Dutch municipalities. This factsheet summarizes their main findings.

Key questions
The international review focused on how to build a closer connection between the universal and preventative youth and family services. Universal services (like youth work, child care and mainstream schools) aim to facilitate the normal development of children and to prevent small problems from becoming severe. Preventative services (like health care, many Youth and Family Centres and the Care and Advice Teams in schools) aim to detect problems and intervene at an early stage, to coordinate support and to refer children and families to the specialised youth care services if needed.

The key questions of the review were:
1. How could parental involvement regarding the development of municipal policies, universal and preventative services and enhancing the impact of support offered by primary services be enhanced?
2. How could municipalities, professionals and services such as Youth and Family Centres (CJGs) reach out more effectively to families, engage more proactively, become more ‘welfare-minded’ rather than ‘care-minded’ and facilitate the social and informal networks of families?

Method
The team undertook two days of visits and debates in the municipalities of Stichtse Vecht and Leeuwarden. The experts listened, observed and engaged in open dialogue with aldermen, policy makers, professionals, volunteers and clients. The review team offered collective perspectives on the range of strengths, challenges, opportunities and risks on topics that came up. The review resulted in a report that was presented during two conferences in the Netherlands in October 2012. For the experts it was virtually impossible to get a complete impression of the policies and practices in two municipalities in only two days. Nevertheless, the report can offer anyone interested opportunities for reflection, discussion and the creation of new perspectives.

Findings
In the experts’ opinion the municipalities have made a really positive start in the transition. The team became enthusiastic by the focus on strengthening citizens’ and parents’ own capacities for
taking personal responsibility, enabling families to be equal partners in the change process and to have a clear voice in shaping this. The determination to have local people more involved in the development of policies and governance of services and individual family plans was regarded to be a very positive element. There was a common recognition of the importance of making support accessible, embedded within local communities, built around a family’s existing network and able to be ‘turned to’ early for support without stigma.

Some issues raised were a possible lack of clarity about available resources in the future: to invest on building further capacities in communities by involving parents in the management of their own challenges. And to facilitate all to engage in a more proactive way in co-developing policies, services and approaches. A shared concern of both the experts and the Dutch stakeholders was that there is a risk of prioritizing restructuring systems rather than investing in sustainable alternatives and changing people through reflective practice, leadership investment and work force development. A robust shared framework for all to measure impact and social return on investment is currently not in use. Lacking this information, services may be decommissioned in the future because of budget pressures, which may hinder sustainable transformation.

**Reflective observations**

In general the team recommends focusing more on ‘welfare-minded’ (enabling) instead of ‘care-minded’ (protecting) approaches in policies and services. They envisaged this being carried out by:

- Focusing on improving mental health and positive parenting.
- Developing a youth policy strategy with a concrete action plan.
- Creating closer ‘links’ between all partners and networks via commonly developed vision and goals.
- Prioritizing opportunities for local, grassroots projects and bottom-up approaches.
- Investing in staff development time, peer support and opportunities for professionals from different organisations to shadow each other.
- Developing a common language and therefore a view of family capacities.
- Including school networks in developing this common language and view from the early start.
- Whenever possible, establishing pooled or at least aligned funding resources that go to the partnership as a whole and where outcomes are able to be monitored collectively.

Improvement of parental involvement can be sustained by building on existing initiatives (e.g. child day-care, well baby clinics, schools) and by creating more opportunities for informal meetings where parents/youngsters themselves can help to shape what happens. It is important to create opportunities for the different stakeholders to participate in discussions about the functioning of an organisation in which their viewpoint is taken into consideration. Attractive services that young people and parents find important should be created together with them. Model and celebrate these examples of services.

To work in an outreaching way starts by building upon locations that parents and children already visit (universal and preventative services). Give evidence-based information on the normal development of children and stimulate ‘a positive parenting climate/culture’. Facilitate places for encounters, but leave the creation and concrete design of it to the parents and youngsters themselves. Focus on a respectful reception of families by all professionals working with children and families and create a good relationship with children and families.

The report 'Transforming together: making the journey towards integration of services for children, young people and families' can be downloaded from: [www.youthpolicy.nl](http://www.youthpolicy.nl) or [www.nji.nl/internationaal](http://www.nji.nl/internationaal).