Through the Foundation for Stimulating Happiness [Stichting Ter Bevordering van de Vrolijkheid] that works with children at Asylum Seeking Centres, we learned that the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) at the refugee centre in Apeldoorn would like to participate in our youth project.

‘COA Apeldoorn organises a lot of activities with children and young people.’

After we got the permission of the COA-headquarters, we set the 12th of November 2012 as our date for making a magazine with these young people. Photographer Roel Brekelmans and myself (communication specialist and children’s rights expert) look at each other in surprise as we arrive at the Loolaan. We are outside a villa near to the Apenheul zoo and the Loo Palace. This is significantly different from previous Asylum Seeking Centres we’ve visited.

Margreet and Sahin, the supervisors of COA, welcome us into their ‘glass house’ behind the villa where the asylum seeking families live. Besides this villa, there are two other buildings in the neighbourhood, where 225 asylum seekers in total (including 32 youngsters) stay. Margreet and Sahin tell us proudly that they organise a lot of activities for children and young people. Sahin gives us a tour and we see ping-pong tables, a computer room and a playground. But also a reporting duty room where asylum seekers over 18 years of age have to report to each week.

We collect the children from their rooms. The rooms aren’t very large; let alone for a whole family of sometimes more than two adults and four children. Some children have just come back from seeing Sinterklaas [a Dutch tradition comparable to Santa Claus]. Others choose magazine making over going to their Bible Club. Since we had prepared our activities for a group of children aged 12 to 15, we have to improvise as our group contains six enthusiastic boys and six girls between the age of seven (!) and fourteen.

We split the group in two. I talk, draw and write with the children; not only about what rights they find important for themselves, but also for other children in the Netherlands. Roel teaches them all about photography in practice. Luckily, Margreet and Sahin are there to support us.

We’d like to thank them and the children a lot for their work!
Speak Up!
Why this project?

Children for Children
The children talk about themselves and their rights.

Special attention for children
Interview with Margreet and Sahin

Drawn...
Arman
Hamed
Samar
SPEAK UP!
The making of this children’s rights magazine was run by one-on-one in the context of the European children’s rights project Speak Up!. Two days later we helped a group of school children from the Johan van Oldenbarnevelt Gymnasium in Amersfoort to make their magazine on children’s rights. The results of both activities are included in European research on how children experience their rights. The research is conducted by seven other European countries with groups of school children and children that live in vulnerable situations, eg. they live in a youth institution or are deaf.

The results of these international studies are incorporated in a report for the European Commission by the European Children’s rights organisation Eurochild.

The input of the children will be used to improve Europe’s policies for children.
When we start talking about what is important for children, everybody – even the youngest girl – has an opinion. Children’s rights, that’s to do with the government, isn’t it? Certainly! And what if you were in charge of the Netherlands? What would you like to change?
**PROBLEM SOLVER**

Who? Alexander (14 years old)

From? ‘I’ve been in the Netherlands since 5th September. I came here from Russia.’

What about the Netherlands? ‘I like everything better here. The situation and the atmosphere. There were a lot of fights in Russia. And I’m not originally Russian, but Armenian. I don’t have a lot in common with Russians.’

Hobbies? ‘I love classic cars and kick boxing.’

Favourite colours? ‘Black and orange.’

What do you know about children’s rights? ‘I have only heard about children’s rights since I’ve been in the Netherlands. Everybody told me about them here.’

Most important children’s right? ‘I find it important to resolve all fights.’

If I was in charge... ‘I would help everybody and would make sure that no stupid things would happen. I would give homeless people a house.’

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**HELP EVERYBODY**

Who? Christina (12 years old)

From? ‘I’m from Armenia, but don’t speak the language. I’ve been here for six years now. It wasn’t nice in Armenia. I was little and can’t remember it well.’

Hobbies? ‘I love playing tennis and eating pizza.’

What about the Netherlands? ‘It’s a free country. I’m here with my brother and father. It’s nice to live here. It’s safe here.’

Most important children’s right? ‘I think it’s important that there’s no child abuse.’

If I was in charge... ‘I would help everybody. Especially children that aren’t raised well and are hit by their parents.’

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**SPONGEBOB AND A PERMIT**

Who? Sahar (8 years old)

From? ‘I’m originally from Afghanistan.’

Hobbies? ‘I love to play with children from my class, skate and play on the computer. I find it friendly. I love bananas, carrots, grapes and cola.’

Favourite colours? ‘Red, blue and yellow.’

What about the Netherlands? ‘I go to school, which is nice and I find it friendly in the Netherlands. In Afghanistan there was continuous fighting and there’s a war. I’m here with five people for 30 months now.’

What about Loolaan? ‘It’s kind of fun to live and play with the other children here.’

Wish? ‘I’d like to have a permit. The war in Afghanistan is scary. I find it nice to sit on the couch watching TV, for example Spongebob and Phineas & Ferb.’

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**“EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT CHILDREN HAVE A RIGHT TO PLAY, DON’T THEY!”**
**CHILDREN’S RIGHTS**


*The asylum seeking children said: ‘It is important to be able to learn.’*

The Convention covers everything you deal with in your life from birth to your eighteenth birthday. It’s not only about school, living, health, religion, parents and relatives, but also about child abuse, child labour, war and refugees. For more information: [www.defenceforchildren.nl](http://www.defenceforchildren.nl).

You said: ‘Some children are from Spain and others come from other countries. We aren’t all the same, but it’s essential that we are all treated as equally important.’

**BE KIND**

**Who?** Stiven (12 years old)

**Hobbies?** ‘I love to play outside in the playground and to play football and swim. At school I like mathematics and languages.’

**Favourite colour:** ‘Dark blue.’

**Important children’s right?** ‘I find the right to love very important. My family has to be kind to me and I of course have to be kind too. I have a lovely family with my brother and two sisters. Between the six of us we have to share four beds. My mum and dad sleep together. It’s very tiny.’

**Wish?** ‘That we lived in our own home. I would be able to play more and have my own bed and sleep more peacefully. And my mum wouldn’t be able to watch me all the time.’

**If I was in charge...** ‘I would help handicapped children.’

**SPRINKLE MONEY**

**Who?** Arman (11 years old)

**From?** ‘I’m from Armenia and I’ve lived here with my sister, father and mother for six years now.

**Hobbies?** ‘I love to go to the park, and I love eating lasagne.’

**What about the Netherlands?** ‘The Netherlands is fun. When you move to another country, at first don’t understand anything. That’s difficult. I have learned Dutch at school.’

**What do you know about children’s rights?** ‘I didn’t know about children’s rights.’

**Most important children’s right?** ‘I find it important that children don’t get handicapped or ill. They have the right to be healthy.’

**If I was in charge...** ‘I would make sure that all people get money, otherwise they can’t do anything. At this time it’s financially difficult in the Netherlands.’
Who? Morcal (8 years old)
From? ‘I’ve been living here in the Netherlands for a month and I’m from Afghanistan.’
Hobbies: ‘I love to play outside and in the playground.’
What about the Netherlands? ‘It’s nice in the Netherlands, because I can play with other children. I’m here with my mother, my sister and her husband, and my two brothers.’
If I was in charge... ‘I wouldn’t change a thing in the Netherlands.’
**OVER THE RAINBOW**

**Who?** Miguel (7 years of age)

**From?** ‘I’m from Colombia and have lived here for three years.’

**Hobbies?** ‘I like to play the piano, swim and I love to read, for example Dolfje Weerwolfje. I like broccoli, ranja and mandarin.’

**Favourite colour?** ‘Gold.’

**What about the Netherlands?** ‘The Netherlands is good and beautiful. Everything is nice here.’

**Children’s rights**

‘I had never heard of them.’

**Most important children’s right?** ‘School is important. The most important thing is to be able to learn, in order for you to be able to teach your children in the future.

**If I was in charge...** ‘If I had a home poor people would get money from me.’

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**PLAY**

**Who?** Hamed (9 years old)

**Hobbies?**

‘Soccer and kick boxing,’

**Favourite colour?** ‘Blue’

**Favourite food?** ‘Lasagne.’

**What about the Netherlands?**

‘It’s kind of fun. The Netherlands is safe - there is no war and people are friendly.’

**Children’s rights**

‘Children can do a lot of things, like playing for example.’

**If I was in charge...**

‘I would give people in need of a house, a home.’

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**HELP REFUGEES**

**Who?** Haya (9 years old)

**From?** ‘I was born in Iraq, but left when I was one year old. We have a movie of the war.’

**Hobbies?** ‘I love dogs and pizza and watching TV (Spongebob). I like sport and love to play.’

**Favourite colour?** ‘Purple.’

**What about the Netherlands?**

‘It’s fun in the Netherlands. It’s friendly and nice living here in the Loolaan. It’s also nice at school.’

**Children’s rights**

‘In Iraq there are refugees. Somebody has to help them. They need food and water from their friends or people that live there.’

**If I was in charge...**

‘I would help people by giving them more money.’
NO WAR
Who? Dulce (8 years old)
From? ‘I’m from Colombia and have been living here with my father, mother, sister and two brothers for seven years now. They had imprisoned my eldest brother in Colombia and released him again. After that it was not longer safe for us there.’
What about the Netherlands? ‘In the Netherlands it’s fun. I like learning different languages at school. And it’s safer here.’
Hobbies? ‘I love puppies, soup and playing the guitar.’
Favourite colours? ‘Red and purple.’
Children’s rights? ‘I didn’t know about the Convention on the Rights of the Child.’
Most important children’s right? ‘I think it’s important that we can stay together with our whole family and that nobody gets killed. Otherwise I will be very sad and I will have very bad memories.’
What about Loolaan? ‘There are many children here and I often play with them. They often knock on our door. Sometimes it’s busy and noisy, even when we’re sleeping. I don’t like that.’
If I was in charge... ‘I would make sure that there would be no more war. I’m afraid of it, even in my dreams. And I would like to change the weather, but of course I can’t.’

MAKE MY OWN CANDY
Who? Valentina (11 years old)
From? ‘I’m from Colombia. I’ve been here for seven years now. I can’t remember anything from Colombia.’
Hobbies? ‘I love to swim and draw. My favourite school subject is mathematics.’
Favourite colours? ‘Light blue, red and pink.’
What about the Netherlands? ‘It’s fun here. I’m here with my father, mother, sister and brother. It’s nice living in the Loolaan. There’s a big garden and my friends live here. For example my friend Christina (she draws her with a lot of little hearts) and Dayra are good friends.’
If I was in charge... ‘I would make everything free. Often I’d like to buy something, but it’s too expensive and I can’t have it. And if things run out, I would make sure there were enough products. And that I can make my own candy.’

A STRANGE NOSE
Who? Victoria (7 years old)
From? ‘I’m from the Congo and find it quite hard, because my brother and sister are still there. I would rather have them here. I’ve lived in the Netherlands for five years now.’
Hobbies? ‘I love to sing in the choir, dance and run. I’m in the fourth group of the Heuvellaan school. I also like to play and shop and buy things I need, for example, paper to write on.’
What about the Netherlands? ‘The Netherlands is fun. I can speak Dutch very well. They speak French in the Congo. I can’t speak that language very well.’
What did you draw? ‘I have drawn a picture of a bit of a crazy boy, with a strange nose.’
Arman

Hobby: voetbal

Hamed

Taal: voetbal

Jaar: 9

Hamed

Taal: voetbal

Jaar: 11

Hamed

Nieuw jaar: moment

Hamed

Muiske

Hamed
Margreet has worked for the COA for over fifteen years. A little embarrassed, she says: ‘You always keep on having blind spots, even if you work somewhere for a long time.’ Two years ago there was no attention for children and youth as a separate group. ‘I once spoke to a girl and she said: ‘It’s the first time the COA have talked to me,’ Now more and more children come to me for a chat or a hug when they’re sad.’

Margreet and Sahin are very grateful for the Child in the Centre project [Kind in het AZC] – a study by Unicef from 2008-2009. Thanks to this project the COA received additional funding for children. ‘Today children don’t just get attention when your other work is finished, but they now form an integral part of our program. There are two children’s mentors at the Centre and together with the Foundation for Stimulating Happiness [Stichting Ter Bevordering van de Vrolijkheid] COA is working on the development of a Children’s Council.’
ik vind school leuk

Nederland is actief gezeefd
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Editor: Simone Bommelje
Final editor: Sandra Ekkelboom (Dutch version);
Alex Welch (English version)
Photography by the children:
Alexander
Armand
Christina
Dulce
Hamed
Haya
Miguel
Morsal
Sahar
Stiven
Valentina
Victoria

Under the supervision of photographer: Roel Brekelmans.

ono-ono, your magazine
www.ono-ono.nl
ono is Japanese for “so many men, so many minds”. Your own ono-ono Magazine will capture your event and the participants in words and photos and it’ll make it last longer. This can even be done within 24 hours after your event.

Contact for your ono-ono magazine:
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