

# TASKFORCE GAZETTE



Positive parenting is a parenting principle that assumes children are born good and with the desire to do the right thing. It emphasizes the importance of mutual respect between parent and child and using positive ways to parent. The positive parenting approaches focus on teaching proper future behavior instead of punishing past misbehavior. As the Kingdom Taskforce for Children Rights we embrace these principles and it is one of our spearheads.

In this new edition of the Taskforce Gazette we're happy to share some of the projects and activities that are happening on the Dutch Caribbean islands regarding positive parenting and positive psychology.



# Project Highlight

## EC2 SABA

Expertise Center Education Care (EC2) consists of a small team that offers support to people in education on Saba. The positive parenting of EC2 therefore stands for positive teaching, based on positive pedagogy and positive psychology. All EC2 employees have received training in positive parenting, positive pedagogy and positive psychology. Jet van Heijnsbergen, director of EC2, says they have taken this approach because “everything you give attention to, grows.”

All children on Saba aged 3 years and older are known at EC2. Younger children are monitored by the baby clinic. EC2 collaborates with the baby clinic via the Care, Advice & Referral Team (CART) network, which meets every month.



One of the first things EC2 does when a child is referred to them is to identify their strengths. They look at the child's learning style to find out what the child naturally does well so that they can use those strengths to help the child improve. They then create learning goals with the child, the parents and the school. Jet notes that “children like to come to us because of this. We do not point out their faults, nor do we reject them. This provides a safe environment to grow in so that they communicate faster, and we can reach them more easily and guide them better.”

EC2 works together with primary and secondary schools on Saba. Teachers talk about students with someone from EC2's core team every other week. In these 'child discussions', EC2 gives teachers tips on how to interact with the children. EC2 also does school observations when necessary and sometimes tests for learning disabilities and social development delays. Some children go to EC2 during school hours for extra guidance.



EC2 offers speech therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, resilience training and dyslexia training, and works with short and long-term guidance plans. On average, a short-term guidance plan requires 4 to 5 months to work on a goal, while long-term plans can take longer. The treatment is concluded after a new observation and a successful evaluation with the teachers. E2C, Jet notes, works with “very concrete goals and measuring instruments that enable us to see whether there has been any development.”

For the first time these past Christmas holidays, EC2 arranged with a number of parents to introduce a certain routine in the day of the child, using pictograms (a graphic representation). Children were expected to do several activities independently with the so-called 'three box system'. The three box system consists of *first, then and last*. The parents were tasked with planning activities with children using the pictograms in order to experience the ease of the process for themselves. The results are very promising!

“The positive approach is beneficial to most children, but we see greater progress when it is used at school and at home,” says Jet. “Positive parenting does not mean that there is never punishment, but that very logical consequences are attached to both positive and negative behavior. We look at the complete picture of the child. For example, if the child has caused damage somewhere, we won’t go into it too deeply, but the child will learn to repair or clean it up.”

At EC2, they have also noticed that sharing experiences is very important. “It is good if parents are allowed to come to school so that they can see for themselves what the child is doing and how they react to challenges. That is why we regularly make video recordings for parents, so that they can see what works well. We also do home visits, but people can sometimes be a bit hesitant.” EC2 often sees incredible breakthroughs in children’s behavior; for example, “the bully of the class eventually became the leader, a child who was known to be aggressive became very good at talking about their behaviour and became amazing at self-reflection.” EC2 constantly reminds parents of the importance of continuous encouragement even after children experience such breakthroughs. The new behavior has yet to anchor and integrate and must therefore be nurtured.

“We often tell everyone not to forget to compliment a child when they do something well!” Jet pauses for a moment. “Now I say ‘don’t forget’ but I should phrase it as ‘remember’, because this addresses your positive skills.”



# In Conversation With...

## TIENDA DI EDUCACION

In 2012, Tienda di Educacion (education shop) was founded in Aruba to provide support and guidance in the education of children aged 0 to 18. It was set up as a two-year project, but more than a decade later it continues to do its work despite challenges with limited resources. Similar to the Netherlands, Tienda di Educacion has a so-called short dial-up number: 161—which is a toll-free number that can be called anonymously by parents and others. Tienda di Educacion is part of the Center for Youth and Family (CJG) and is one of several institutions that form the education committee of Aruba. The CJG is a one-stop-shop where people can go to discuss issues regarding youth welfare. At the counter, visitors are referred to support groups based on their specific questions or needs. Tienda di Educacion, in collaboration with other organizations, also gives workshops to parents and professionals who work with children.

All employees of Tienda di Educacion took a conscious discipline course in 2014 which helped them to challenge traditional ideas about child-rearing. The Taskforce Gazette spoke with Tienda di Educacion's coordinator, Rhomyko Winklaar.



## How do you convey ideas about Positive Education to Tienda di Educacion's clients?

*We have to talk to them a lot because they were raised differently. They sometimes say, 'But it didn't kill me either! Look at me here, I'm a grown man/woman who participates in the community!' It is sometimes a challenge to adjust parents' mindsets. We do this very tactically, so as not to step on anyone's toes and explain to parents that children have rights and they should be considered.*

## How receptive are parents to this 'new' approach?

*We try to explain to parents that the way they treat their children is ultimately taken over by the children themselves. If they yell at them, they will yell back. 'You are their example,' we always say. Positive parenting does not mean that you become 'best friends' with your child. A hierarchy must remain, but what we want to convey is that it is possible to educate them in positive ways.*

## How do you address parents' resistance?

*Here in Aruba we often have to deal with other family members, sometimes from outside the nuclear family, who also have something to say about the upbringing of the children. Think of grandmothers and grandfathers who live in the house and take on much of the upbringing. Sometimes there are older siblings, uncles and aunts, who resist positive parenting. They cite the Bible which states that adults may beat children.*

*Parents don't know what advice to follow, that of grandmother who raised fifteen children or of this gentleman who has learned something from a book and has some experience. We try not to achieve too much too soon and remain aware that we must first gain their trust. As things progress we give parents more tools that they can use at home—tools that are tailored to individual situations. It's not a one-size-fits-all.*



## Do you also apply positive parenting principles when dealing with parents?

*We are talking about parental psychoeducation which aims to re-educate parents in the field of communication, education and interaction with their children. By applying the principles of positive parenting, the parents eventually come to see that it is better for the well-being of the child, but also for their well-being and the relationship between the parents themselves.*

## Are there any parents who choose to continue the old way?

*Yes, there are. In those cases, we offer to make home visits. They can also come to our education shop and we can act as a kind of intermediary where they want us to, such as at school or sports clubs. We also continue to invite these parents to the workshops and group discussions, where other parents share their experiences. Sometimes the experience of peers going through the same thing has more influence than the views of an expert.*

## Given that it is not mandatory for parents to participate in the activities of Tienda di Educacion, how do you keep parents involved?

*There are cases where parents are referred to us by the Guardianship Council (Voogdijraad) or Bureau Sostenemi, and then we inform them if they no longer show up, because participation is a condition of the guidance at these organizations. With other parents who do come voluntarily, we have to do extra outreach when they stay away.*



## How do people find you?

*We make an extra effort to get publicity by liaising with the press and sending regular updates. We don't have a reading culture on the islands, so we always make sure to keep it short and sweet and relevant.*

## Currently, Tienda di Educacion is running a pilot project in collaboration with Kiwanis. Tell us more about that?

*This project was set up for children from 0 to 4 and focuses on parents' empowerment. It is being carried out with several other organizations and it may become a regular service for this target group after the pilot.*

## What is the vision for positive parenting in Aruba?

*That parents will see this way of parenting as the best option. This requires a major campaign, but we don't have the funds for that. That is why in the future we will go into the residential areas again to contact the key opinion leaders in order to inspire the neighborhood through them. It takes an island to raise a child. If we all put in the effort, we will ultimately reap the benefits as an island.*

**Vision pedagogico di Aruba**

6 punto basico:

- 1**  **Lanta bo yiu den un ambiente safe y amoroso**
- 2**  **Apoyo positivo, guia y pasa tempo hunto**
- 3**  **Sea realistico**
- 4**  **Disciplina positivo**
- 5**  **Cuida bo mes**
- 6**  **Busca sosten y ayudo**

**Nos ta cla pa yuda bo!**

Sosten pa mayor con pa lanta yiu:

Tienda di Educacion 

Financia for di fondo di e social oraganisacion 

Fundacion pa Nos Muchanan 



# Children and Youth Speak Up

## ENCELIA FOUNDATION

Encelia is a crisis and observation center on Curaçao that temporarily houses children in need of emergency support. They assist children at all stages of their development and provide various forms of treatment with the assistance of internal and external partners.

Encelia is headed by Soraida Corion. Her team includes a remedial educationalist (orthopegagogue) and a number of group leaders. Each child is assigned to a leader for the daily activities and can always go to Soraida or the orthopedagogue for additional guidance. Encelia has an open-door policy for children and usually has “about eight children at the same time. We try to simulate a family situation as much as possible.”



Children stay at Encelia for an average of 6 to 12 months. Some stay longer because of special circumstances, but Encelia tries to discharge the children as soon as possible. Encelia works with voluntary out-of-home placements which allows parents to temporarily place their children at Encelia with the support of an external organization. The organizations that refer parents to Encelia are the Guardianship Council (Voogdijraad), SOAW, Yudaboyu and Skuchami. Schools can also register children, but only if the children receive guidance from one of the above-mentioned organizations. This setup allows Encelia to remain neutral when conflicts arise between parents, for example if parents were to separate during the child's placement at Encelia. During network consultations with other care organizations, Encelia always represents the interests of the child. Soraida says that "when the time comes for a child to go home, we want to be able to work with the whole family and provide objective advice regarding their care and placement." Encelia writes a care and advice plan that is sent to the placement organization and the child's primary care givers. In some cases, an ambulatory care giver will take over after placement back home if necessary.

In 2019, Encelia threatened to close completely due to subsidy discounts. It subsequently decided to close on weekends and employees agreed to receive lower salaries, so that the much-needed care for children could continue. Encelia is the only crisis and observation center in Curaçao.

We spoke with one of Encelia's young residents:

**How old are you?**

*I am 8 years old.*

**How long have you been living at Encelia?**

*1 year.*



**How do you feel about living at Encelia?**

*I play a lot. We go out sometimes. We go to the sea. I've learned how to set the table. I also learned to count. I like living here.*

**What do you find most difficult about living at Encelia?**

*When the other kids get mad at me when I'm naughty. I've learned to say I'm sorry and to talk to the kids, but sometimes I still find it difficult. Everything else is going very well.*

**What is the biggest difference between living at home and living with Encelia?**

*We go on trips much more often here. I really like going to the sea. When I lived at home we didn't go out very often.*

**What do you wish your family would do more at home that is done at Encelia?**

*Talk to me more.*

**Do you think your parents are learning that now?**

*Yes, I think the tantes (leaders) here are teaching them.*

**How have you changed since living at Encelia?**

*I listen better. I feel happier and less angry. I do get sad sometimes, but not that often.*

**Are you glad that you got to live at Encelia for a while?**

*Yes.*

**Tell us something about yourself.**

*I like to write, play and swim. And I love animals!*

*I like horses, parakeets and turtles.*

**Do you have animals at Encelia?**

*No, but we sometimes go on trips to visit the animals.*

**The trips with Encelia have taught you that you like horses?**

*Yes*

**Do you want to share anything else?**

*No.*

*Thank you tante!*



Encelia uses basic principles in positive psychology to encourage and empower the children in its care. "We do this by not focusing on what went wrong, but expanding on the good," says Soraida. Parents are also given positive parenting tools to use at home. These tools help parents to see and emphasize the good rather than bad in their children. Encelia also works with the Signs of Safety method, which ensures homes are safe and outlines what is expected of parents before children are allowed to return home.

# At a Glance

'At a Glance' is an overview of what is happening on the islands around the current theme of the Taskforce Gazette: **positive parenting**.

## ARUBA

In Aruba, there are ongoing efforts to strengthen partnerships and to coordinate what is offered to parents to fill gaps and avoid overlaps. The Educational Vision Committee which was established by the government in 2016 has been working assiduously and has benefited from the support of several organizations that are invested in the educational vision.



## BONAIRE

Center for Youth and Family (CJG) supports parents by facilitating solution-oriented discussions about positive parenting skills.

Parents are also motivated in 1-on-1 discussions and receive guidance in preventing and solving conflicts with their children. This guidance is provided through parenting courses and radio programs that teach parents how to cope and improve the relationship with their children.

## CURAÇAO

'Triple P' parenting courses are offered to vulnerable families who have received social housing from Fundashon Kas Popular. Many of these parents also benefit from 1-on-1 sessions in the form of short interventions. Additionally, various confidence-building seminars are organized for parents of 0-12 and 12-16-year-olds.

## ST. MAARTEN

In 2022 St. Maarten will start with the development and implementation of a Positive Parenting Training Program that incorporates a variety of interventions, consistent with diverse needs of parents and international best practice.

The project will be implemented in four phases:

Phase 1: Formative Assessment

Phase 2: Development of Training, Monitoring & Evaluation Materials

Phase 3: Conduct Training Courses & Capacity Building Frameworks

Phase 4: Formulation of Final Recommendations and Products

As a result of the intervention, it is expected that St. Maarten will see improvements in intra-family communication, the strengthening of family bonds and an increase in trust between parents/caregivers and children. Parents will be better equipped to support their children through all critical stages of development.

## SABA

Through the recently established Child Rights Week, Saba has broadened the scope of its parenting support and child-rearing programs. Child Rights Week is part of a larger national effort that includes a mentoring project and an active youth council. From the *BES(t)4Kids* program there are also initiatives aimed at enriching parents' skills by educating them about child development and providing parenting tips.

## ST. EUSTATIUS

OLE-unit social support is organizing parental participation meetings at the secondary school to discuss challenges that teens face and to educate and empower parents to handle these challenges. Some of the popular discussion topics are: setting boundaries and structure; connecting with teens; sexuality and sexual behavior.

November 15-21, 2021, was observed as anti-Child Abuse Week under the slogan: *Neglect is closer than you think!* The Week's activities focused on defining and raising awareness of the impact of neglect, particularly among young people who expressed their fears and needs. We also spoke with key stakeholders about what can be done to prevent and address child neglect.



# Diving Deeper

WITH ANGELA DEKKER

Angela Dekker moved to Curaçao with her family in 1974 and started working as an educational consultant (pedagogue) at the Ministry of Education of the then Netherlands Antilles. Along with her teaching, she conducted research into the quality of childcare centers in Curaçao and drew up a number of minimum requirements that childcare centers had to meet. She then set up her own foundation, SIFMA, and worked at the Foundation for Social Housing (FKP) on a center for childcare in the deprived area of Seru Fortuna. Angela notes that Krèsh Dede Pikiña, the 'model nursery' at the time, had initial success but after a while struggled to fulfill its mandate.

"Based on the minimum requirements for childcare and the rights of the child, we then set up courses on all islands to train the staff of the childcare centers and thus guarantee their quality," she says.

In 1995, after Hurricane Luis, the need on the Windward Islands was so great that Angela moved her family to St. Maarten and setup a SIFMA office. Partly through cooperation with organizations in Barbados which had advanced children's rights legislation and policies, the Antillean government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Angela presented the first NGO Report on the Rights of the Child to the United Nations in Geneva in 2001 and has advised the government on the treaty since.

"I had a lot of trouble with the reports on the rights of the child at first," Angela says, "because they emphasized the negative aspects of parenting on the islands. I remain convinced that most parents want to do better, but often cannot. It is not pleasant for parents to be told that they are not doing well. It has been clear for a while now how this can be solved by supporting parents in the field of positive parenting. So now it just has to be done."



At the Ministry of Education in St. Maarten, she has also focused on innovations in education and early childhood, “because if you don’t do well in the first four years of life, you can forget it afterwards.” For the past three years, Angela has worked at the BES(t)4Kids program as project leader for St. Eustatius.

Childcare centers on St. Eustatius participate in a *twinning program* with childcare centers in the Netherlands. To better understand each other’s work, employees from St. Eustatius and the Netherlands visit centers in both countries. “It was very nice to hear that, when they returned, the employees of St. Eustatius had observed a special difference in the Netherlands. They saw that they were much less ‘on top of the children’ and involved children in making choices. They decided they wanted to do this more on St. Eustatius. I think you should always look at it that way. They want to, but the social conditions on the island do not always cooperate. The good thing is that they are now finding their own way.”

Angela says that parents, teachers and others habitually place too much emphasis on what is going wrong instead of what is going well or can be improved. “As a professional you can explain this to parents, but the best thing is if you can demonstrate it, so that parents can have hands-on experience of how it can be done differently,” she says. Parents regularly indicate that they were brought up in ‘the old way’, “so it’s good that conversations about this are happening now. Even though we’ve been at it for twenty-five years, it’s still not that long.” She notes that it is difficult for parents to suddenly relinquish the familiar approach, which is why in the Active Parenting training, parents on St. Maarten are taught concrete and down to earth skills.

Much has changed in education on the islands since 1974, from a simple matter of students now being able to look adults in the eyes when they talked to them to the fact that students can now easily study in the Netherlands and children of the Leeward Islands can now be cared for in their mother tongue. “The Windward Islands have always been a bit disadvantaged, although you’re not allowed to say that, but a lot has changed there too. Children can now go to secondary school on their own island. In the past, those children had to go to Curaçao or Aruba, so there was a lot of the children’s upbringing that the parents no longer experienced.”





According to Angela, high levels of poverty make it difficult for many families to remain positive. More needs to be done by everyone to support parents so that they will play more active roles in their children's lives inside schools and in the wider society. "There is too much focus on school performance and little attention is paid to the general wellbeing of a child. Positive parenting means that attention is paid to the complete development of the child. There should be less emphasis on memorizing knowledge. Knowledge changes so quickly these days. The question is what will they gain from that in the future."

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Angela Dekker lives on St. Maarten and is project leader of BES(t)4Kids on St. Eustatius. She wants all islands to pay more attention to childcare and parental involvement. She can be reached at sarsapilla5@gmail.com



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