

Annual Report 2024

NIKE
CHANGING STORIES

Changing Stories Foundation

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In 2024 we received support from:



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Preface

Dear friends of Changing Stories,

2024 was a year full of movement, growth, and learning. A year in which we laughed with children in refugee camps, saw young people express themselves through creativity, and continued building imaginary worlds while making sure every child is seen.

When Changing Stories visits refugee camps and emergency shelters, we're not just entertaining: we're restoring dignity. We're saying to each child: **You matter. You are seen.** In places where children are reduced to numbers, where their lives are marked by fear and waiting – that message is needed.

We offer children the chance to express themselves, to feel joy and to be part of a wonderful and positive experience – and hopefully they will grow up more equipped to process trauma, to trust others and to dream bigger.

Imagination is a gift you should never have to give up – a skill you should never lose. Unfortunately, fantasising and dreaming are abilities that can fade, muscles that need exercise. That's what we aim to do, flexing the muscles of imagination and creativity.

This report looks back at the stories you helped make possible. Because of your involvement, we were able to make it all possible and light a spark of imagination in places where hope is needed.

Whether you donated once, supported a fundraiser, teamed up with us or simply followed our work: thank you. Because of you, children could dance in Calais, draw in Serres, and dream in Arnhem.

Let's keep believing in the power of imagination – and the resilience of children, everywhere.

With gratitude,
The team at Changing Stories

A word from our Supervisory Board

As outlined in the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to play. Yet, displaced children in Europe often face daily violations of this basic right. Play, fun, and imagination are vital to a child's development and well-being. That is why Changing Stories sets out to create these moments of fun, imagination, and connection with others. Children can temporarily let go of their harsh reality, forge positive memories, and through this Changing Stories aims to stimulate children's resilience.

Is Changing Stories successful? The photos in this annual report will hopefully speak for themselves. In the past year, the Changing Stories Foundation reached 940 children and 530 adolescents in 4 countries.

The supervisory board is very pleased to see that the impact of the foundation is growing, and we commend the board for its continued efforts towards professionalisation and effectiveness.

It is an absolute honour for the five of us to be able to offer our support in the impactful and professional foundation that they have established. We are grateful to every single person who has contributed to changing the stories of displaced children in the past year, whether it be in the form of financial donations, material support, promotion or words of encouragement.

Together, we can and will continue to achieve more!

With pride and gratitude,

The Supervisory Board of Changing Stories Foundation.

Magda van Eck, Chantal Berkers, Melchior Philips, Tomas Moerman and Sjouke Ummels

Highlights 2024

1,470

Children
engaged

5

Years of
establishment

38

Volunteers

5

Abroad projects
organised

13

Partnerships
established

50+

Workshops
organised

Our partners



rijnijsel



3.

Mission & vision

The Rights of the Child

In 1989, world leaders made a historic commitment to the children of the world by adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – an international agreement on childhood. Nearly every country in the world has signed this convention, the Netherlands in 1995.

The rights of children fleeing from war are being violated in numerous ways, for example the right stated in Article 31:

"States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational, and leisure activity."

As European citizens, we believe it is our responsibility to act against the injustices faced by displaced children in Europe. By using our strengths and talents, we have the power to make a meaningful difference in the world and stand up for the rights of the most vulnerable – children who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in dire situations.



Post-crisis

Most of the children we work with are living in a post-crisis situation (and have experienced war, violence or natural disasters). It is a conscious choice not to work with children who are in a direct crisis situation (like warzones or other an other immediate crisis) – because we believe that in crisis children need emergency care and that is not what we offer. In post-crisis situations however, for example in camps, the care often comes down to the very basics – food, clothing, sanitary facilities; while play and recreation are often being forgotten or even being perceived as not necessary.

We notice there is a gap in what children need and what is being offered, we try to fill this gap by using our capacities and getting active. While doing so we are very aware we are learning ongoingly and are questioning ourselves all the time. We are working in a field where a lot of racism and white saviourism takes place and for this reason we believe this critical attitude is a necessity.

High necessity

Changing Stories carries out projects both in the Netherlands and internationally in places where the need is high. To ensure this goal, we have established criteria to determine when a location meets these requirements. In advance of a project we use the criteria to measure if there is a high necessity for us to go there. This could either be because there are no other organisations present to provide leisure and play, or because the circumstances in the specific location are very appalling.



Main goal

Our main goal is to stimulate the imagination and resilience of displaced or refugee minors by creating moments of play and creativity.

Resilience is the ability to recover from difficulties – most people are incredibly resilient, but due to long asylum procedures, not having a safe place to live and due to trauma, this resilience can be affected. By creating new, positive memories – boosting the ability to play and to imagine, resilience can be strengthened and help children thrive in their future.

We see the children we work with as the humans they are, not as the single identity of being 'a refugee'. Through our method we make sure that together with the children at that moment in time we create a positive time and positive memories.

For children that experienced trauma it is important to restore emotion regulation, increase selfconfidence, feel a sense of agency and awaken the ability to be playful and creative. To achieve this we work according five key-principles that we've integrated in our method.



Key principles

Agency. Agency is the sense of being in control of one's life and having the ability to make choices. It is vital for psychological well-being, as it helps maintain stability. Acting autonomously is a key strategy in building resilience. We aim to provide children with as much choice as possible in what they make (form, colour, and size) encouraging their sense of agency.

Imagination. Imagination is the act of forming new ideas, images, or concepts of things that are not directly present to the senses. Through our work, we aim to stimulate the ability to imagine alternative realities, helping participants cultivate hope for the future. We invite children into our imaginative world, co-creating stories together by asking them, *what could happen next?*

Play. "An activity for enjoyment and recreation," directly aligning with the universal rights of the child (UN, 1979). Play is essential for children to experiment and learn about life, to navigate social interactions and emotions, and to build new, positive, and healthy memories. It also offers a way to process experiences and release tension.

Belonging. "Feeling part of something," particularly being part of a group. In our projects, we experience the power of social connection as both healing and transformative. We foster this sense of belonging through synchronicity in play and ensuring that our activities are as inclusive and safe as possible.

Positive memories. Through the activities mentioned above, we create new, positive memories that children can hold onto. These memories, become part of their personal mental toolkit, contributing to resilience and strength for the future.

How our work delivers our aims

Professional team. Our team consists of professionals who undergo a rigorous training process before going on a project. The team consist of theatre makers, drama teachers, clowns and drama therapists and each team member has their own qualities that contributes to the benefit of the team and the quality of our projects. We are actively working towards becoming a more diverse team in terms of background, gender, colour, religion in order to create a team that consist of different role models for the children we work with.

Partners. We always collaborate with trusted organisations that operate directly on the ground. These partners a safe environment for our work and have already established effective ways of reaching the children. Working alongside such organisations also enables us to ensure our efforts are tailored to local needs. This approach helps to maximise our impact and embed our principles in a sustainable way, even after we leave.

Anti-racism. Our foundation stands for the core values of human dignity, integrity and equality. We are aware that we currently are a predominantly white group who work in spaces where a lot of racism takes place. We take a definitive stance against racism and discrimination in all its forms. We recognise that White Saviourism is prevalent within humanitarian work and we actively work against this.

Non-therapeutic. While we regonise that play and imagination can have a positive impact on trauma, we very consciously decide we are not focussing on 'healing' or the therapeutic aspect of the arts. We are not a full team of therapists, there is no sequence in working with the children and there is no call to help from the children or their parents. But still, we have experienced the positive and healing benefits of the projects and the impact they have on the development of children.



Pop-up. Our project abroad are pop-up. This means we visit sites for a short amount of time. If we go to a place where we work for a few days in a row with the same group of children we go for a maximum of 3-days – if we aim to visit different (for example) camps, slums, shelters or orphanages within the period of one project we go for about 10-days. Because of the short timeframe, we can give a lot of energy. Aside from this we also actively stand against the existence of ‘refugee camps’ and for that reason we do not want to contribute to improving the situation of the camps. Last and even most important we have our pop-up character to make sure there is no attachment between children and artists. With vulnerable children who have already had to experience so much loss, it is important that we help them, but not establish an attachment relationship so that they would have to say goodbye again. We invest in strengthening the resilience, qualities and hope within these children; something that they carry with them wherever they go.

Reflection. We continually evaluate our activities to ensure they are in line with our objectives. We communicate with all team members and volunteers on an ongoing basis and gather their feedback post-project. We also seek feedback and evaluation from the organisations we work with in order to find out exactly what the value of our projects is in and in which way we could develop them to deepen our impact. Considering the broad spectrum of needs and specific challenges within the groups we work with, we feel it is essential to continually adapt our methodology to incorporate new techniques and ensure the skills of our team are used to the maximum benefit of the participants.



Where we have been

Borders of Europe - sparking imagination

This year, we travelled to refugee camps in Greece, France, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sometimes quite literally to forests or tents, where people live in limbo, waiting for a better future.

In Athens, Ritsona, Serres, Calais, and Bihac, we made a difference for children through games, theatre and creativity. Sometimes with bubbles, sometimes with dance contests. But always with one goal: helping children just be children again.

"Not only the children were amazed and chasing the bubbles, but the parents too. There was only joy." – Team Calais

In the Netherlands - giving young talent a voice

In the Netherlands, we were active at emergency shelters throughout the country. From Oss to Ter Apel and from Haarlem to Oosterbeek.

We also launched something new: expo projects for unaccompanied minors. In Arnhem, young girls and boys from Somalia, Eritrea and Syria explored art forms like collage art, lighting design and shadow theatre. Their work was shown in a colourful exhibition.

Also in Arnhem we partnered with RijnIJssel Fashion Tailor making our first steps in growing our educational branch.



International projects

Greece

In early 2024, we travelled to Athens and three refugee camps in the region: Ritsona, Malakasa, and Thiva. For the first four days, we worked with partner organisation ROSA, who set up a mobile women's space using vans and tents outside the camps. While they provided medical care and activities for women, we were responsible for delivering a children's programme. Following this, we spent three days in Athens collaborating with Children's Rights Network and Glocal Roots.

In July, we were active in Serres, Northern Greece, working with Lifting Hands International (LHI) and our new partner International Humanitarian Aid (IHA). The week was a success, reaching a large number of children. Our partners shared warm feedback:

- LHI: "It was honestly such a pleasure having you here with us again... the excitement in the kids' eyes was genuinely beautiful."
- IHA: "The experience added colour to the reality these children live in... I hope we can collaborate again in the future!"

France

In March, our team visited the informal camp in Calais, where many people still attempt the dangerous crossing to the UK and every form of relief is very much needed. Tragically, 20 people, including two children, have died in 2024 at this deadly border. Just before our visit, a seven-year-old girl drowned; her family, still in the camp, were already planning their next crossing attempt.

Together with Project Play, our team brought relief through theatre improvisation, art workshops and dance contests. Even adults joined in during the bubble-blowing games, providing rare moments of joy for all.

Bosnia & Herzegovina

In October, we spent eight powerful days working in the Lipa and Borici camps in Bosnia & Herzegovina, in partnership with our new collaborator, IPSIA. Although we initially anticipated a higher number of children, the reality on the ground was different — many had already moved on, and those who remained were often hard to reach. Yet this made our presence all the more vital.

The children we did connect with — many of whom are travelling the dangerous Balkan route — showed an immediate and touching response to our activities. Despite their harsh circumstances, they opened up through creativity, play, and shared moments of joy. These moments were not only magical, they were essential: offering children a rare chance to simply be children again.

An unexpected and heartening outcome was that our approach also resonated strongly with young men in the camp of Lipa, this is a group often overlooked but deeply in need of positive, humanising interaction. The experience reaffirmed the power of our method and the importance of being flexible and present where the need is greatest.



National projects

Expo project with unaccompanied minors

In July and October, we carried out two creative youth projects at emergency shelters in Arnhem. Many of the young participants have experienced displacement and instability, and these projects offered them a safe and inspiring environment to express themselves.

Over the course of several days, they took part in a wide variety of creative workshops – including photo booth sessions, T-shirt and fabric design, lamp-making, wooden decor design (sketching, painting, sawing), glow-in-the-dark face painting, shadow play, soundscape creation, illustrated zine making, and collage-making. Both projects concluded with a public exhibition, where the youth proudly presented their work. In July, they also prepared and shared traditional dishes from their home countries, adding a heartfelt and communal touch to the event. The exhibition in October was held at Rozet Arnhem, where participants helped build the display and welcomed visitors with pride and joy.

Feedback from shelter staff was overwhelmingly positive, the staff told us they saw a big difference in how the minors interacted with each other. They noticed less fights and more togetherness. Both events were seen as powerful moments of connection, creativity, and visibility for the young people involved.

Children's projects at emergency shelters

We also we delivered 15 project days at emergency shelters throughout the Netherlands. We visited shelters in Oss, Ter Apel, Utrecht, Almelo, Haarlem, Leeuwarden, Oosterbeek and Arnhem. Creating safe spaces for creativity, play, and connection.

Education

Pilot Project with RijnIJssel - Arnhem

In March, we launched a successful pilot project in collaboration with students from RijnIJssel's Fashion Tailor programme. The students designed and created 11 unique costumes for our performers. Their creativity, craftsmanship, and enthusiasm added new energy and vibrant visual storytelling to our theatre work — making the collaboration both inspiring and mutually enriching. Next year we will continue this collaboration.

Internships, Research & Student engagement

Changing Stories is continuously developing and strengthening its methods through workshops and research. By offering a platform for practice-based learning, we invite students and researchers to contribute fresh perspectives and help shape our evolving approach.

This year we deepened our ties with educational institutions by hosting workshops at HKU and welcoming interns from UCU, HKU and HAN. We also launched a new research collaboration with Eline van de Plas who is studying the impact of our work.



Organisational growth

Strengthening our team and practice

In 2024, our coordination team expanded, strengthening both operational execution and strategic planning. We welcomed new artists, growing our team to 23 trained professionals. This growth is supported by monthly training sessions, continued development of our artist handbook, and a strong emphasis on inclusive creative practices – all reinforcing the quality and consistency of our work.

This year also marked important steps in our professionalisation. We welcomed a new HR coordinator, launched a new audition process for artists and improved internal communication across the organisation.

A highlight was our in-depth team weekend, where we engaged in hands-on workshops on bubbles, acrobatics, and visual storytelling. We also deepened our understanding through lectures on migration and resilience. These moments not only enriched our skills, but also helped us reconnect with our mission and the impact of our work.

Transition to a Supervisory Board

In 2024, Changing Stories Foundation adopted a new governance structure based on the Supervisory Board model – an important step in strengthening the foundation's organisational sustainability.

A Supervisory Board of five members was officially installed in June 2024 and registered with the Dutch Chamber of Commerce. The board brings together relevant expertise in youth mental health, education, finance, asylum systems and public administration. It plays four key roles: oversight, approval of major decisions, strategic guidance, and serving as the formal employer of the executive board.

This new model helps safeguard transparency, accountability, and long-term impact.

Looking ahead

Expanding our reach and strengthening our partnerships

Thanks to our established network across key hotspots in Europe, we are now better able to define and predict our reach. We rely on local knowledge to stay informed about shifts in refugee movements, the location of (new) camps, where the needs of children are greatest, and in which seasons large groups of children are most likely to be stranded.

With greater continuity in our operations, our visibility and recognition within the field have grown. Aid organisations are increasingly able to find and connect with us, leading to new opportunities for collaboration. One such example is our recent partnership with the Belgian foundation We See You, with whom we submitted a joint European funding application for a children's project in Ukraine. This collaboration also includes knowledge exchange and the co-development of new methodologies.

With your continued support, we can:

- Reach more displaced children with powerful, creative interventions
- Build lasting partnerships with organisations that share our mission
- Grow our team of professional changemakers
- Strengthen and scale our method — grounded in practice and research
- Expand our educational reach to inspire the next generation



Financial report

Key financial figures

Item	Amount (€)
Total Income	96,359
Total Expenses	100,364
- Cost of work contracted & outsourced work	45,829
- General expenses	14,054
- Other operating costs	40,481
Net Result (Deficit)	-4,005

Income breakdown

Source	Amount (€)
Funds and Foundations	60,666
Donors and Donations	16,489
Crowdfunding	8,500
Schools, Associations, Churches	4,094
Domestic Project Income	6,610

Cost breakdown

Category	Amount (€)
Foreign Project Coordination	6,965
Artist/Volunteer Allowances	3,342
Travel (Foreign/Domestic)	7,425
Materials (All Projects)	3,306
Domestic Project Coordination	7,507
Educational Project Coordination	2,187

Annual Deficit

In 2024, Changing Stories closed the year with a modest deficit of €4,005. While the number is technically “negative,” we see it as a positive step forward—a deliberate investment in building a stronger, more sustainable organisation. It’s also a marked improvement from our 2023 deficit of €14,757, thanks to increased fundraising and thoughtful financial planning.

We were fortunate to experience a successful financial year in 2022, which gave us the reserves to comfortably carry both the 2023 and 2024 shortfalls. This breathing room allowed us to make decisions that were value-driven. Like, for example a more fair-pay for our project coordinators.

Growing towards fair pay

A large part of our increased costs this year came from paying our people more fairly. For years, our team—artists, educators, coordinators, and volunteers—gave so much, often for far less compensation than they deserved. In 2024, we made it a priority to grow towards fair pay for everybody in our team, increasing their compensations.

Our funding doubled!

We were also incredibly grateful to see such a strong response from funds and foundations, who supported more than double compared to the previous year. This not only helped us grow our programmes, but reassured us that there is trust in our mission and method.

At the same time, we are taking important steps toward growing our financial independence by expanding our donor community. Through individual donations, recurring gifts and gift agreements. Hoping to give our foundation more stability long term.