

Changing Stories Foundation Policy Plan 2025 – 2028

Introduction & Context

1.1 The Rights of the Child

In 1989, world leaders took a historic step by adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - an international agreement concerning the protection and development of children. Nearly every country in the world has committed to this convention, the Netherlands in 1995.

However, the rights of displaced children within Europe continue to be violated in many ways. One of these rights is enshrined in Article 31:

“States Parties recognise 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 and artistic life. 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 activities.”

As European citizens - and as artists, therapists and creatives - we feel we have a responsibility to stand up for children who find themselves in unsafe situations through no fault of their own. Through our creativity, craftsmanship and commitment, we can contribute to a world in which every child is seen and heard, and has access to safety, play and self-expression.

1.2 Development of displaced children

Displaced children within Europe often reside in refugee camps or reception centres, where living conditions are frequently inadequate. Access to education is not always guaranteed, and even basic needs may not be met. In addition to what these children have already experienced in their countries of origin and during their journey to safety, the lack of basic provisions further increases their risk of developing mental health issues and limits their opportunities for development compared to children who have not been displaced.

Despite this, children are incredibly resilient and full of imagination. But imagination and the ability to fantasise are like muscles that need to be continuously exercised. This is vital, as these qualities help children to look ahead and maintain a vision for a better future. Additionally, play is a crucial way for children to explore the world and learn how to connect with others in a healthy manner. Through our theatre projects, we aim to foster safe social connections and enhance resilience and imagination in children on the move within Europe.

Purpose & Core Principles

2.1 Objectives

The foundation has a dual mission:

- a) to stimulate imagination and resilience in displaced children and young people through play and creativity;
- b) to train pupils, students and/or professionals in our methods, raise awareness of our target group and context, and inspire and motivate them to apply socially engaged practices within their own work.

We define resilience as the capacity to recover from difficulties. Through play, imagination and creative expression, we work to strengthen this resilience in children and young people exposed to high levels of stress due to their circumstances.

The foundation's main objective is to foster imagination and resilience in children on the move, with our educational objective supporting this by expanding knowledge on the topic and inspiring others to adopt similar practices.

2.3 Approach to Main Objective

For children aged 4–12 participating in our projects, we use an approach based on five core principles:

- **Play:** We view play as a fundamental right of the child (see Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and essential for development, learning, releasing tension, and creating new memories.
- **Imagination:** By inviting children to think along and shape stories together, we stimulate their ability to envision alternative realities—and, with that, future perspectives.
- **Agency:** Our approach is open and inviting, offering children as much choice as possible in the structure of activities, allowing them to experience ownership and build self-confidence.
- **Belonging:** We foster community and connection through synchronous play, movement and collaboration, promoting social cohesion and interaction among children, even in transient situations.
- **Positive Memories:** By providing a safe, joyful and creative environment, we enable children to build positive memories—hopeful experiences (“green flags”) in minds often filled with negative memories and disruptive experiences (“red flags”).

2.4 Specific Approach for Unaccompanied Minors (Aged 13–18)

For this target group, our primary objective remains the same, but we apply partially different working principles:

- **Artistic Orientation:** We offer young people opportunities to explore various art forms (music, visual arts, fashion, etc.) for expression, relaxation and potential future pathways.
- **Relaxation:** Creative processes and collaboration help young people regulate stress, remain present, and find moments of joy—vital counterweights to trauma and/or chronic stress.
- **Team Building:** Young people from different countries come together, and we create spaces for them to get to know each other through shared goals (e.g., a final presentation) and simple social activities (atmosphere, snacks, music).
- **Agency:** By providing choice in materials and project direction, we stimulate autonomy, which is essential for this group, as regaining a sense of control over their lives is crucial.

Field of Work & Positioning

3.1 Focus on Post-Crisis Situations

Changing Stories works with children in post-crisis contexts. This means that the children we work with have often experienced war, violence or natural disasters but are no longer in immediate crisis situations (such as active war zones or disaster areas) at the time of our projects.

We make this choice consciously: in immediate crises, emergency aid—such as medical care and safety—is the highest priority. Our strength lies in fostering recovery, resilience and processing in the longer term. In post-crisis situations, such as reception camps or asylum centres, we often see that basic care (food, clothing, sanitation) is provided, while play, expression and relaxation are lacking or mistakenly seen as “non-essential.” This is precisely where our added value lies. Our approach is intentionally non-therapeutic and pop-up in nature: short-term, intensive, and focused on strength and resilience without creating emotional dependency.

We actively fill the gap—addressing the need for play and creative outlets—through our expertise. We are conscious of our position, working in a field where racism and white saviourism are complex, real risks. Therefore, we maintain critical reflection on our actions: through structured reflection with team members and partners, we continuously evaluate and further develop our approach. We view our work as an ongoing learning process, with continuous upskilling for our team through monthly training on topics relevant to our work.

3.2 High Necessity

Changing Stories conducts projects within the Netherlands and internationally but only in locations where there is a clear need or a significant lack of play, expression and psychosocial support for children.

To determine where we become active, we use several internal criteria, assessing whether other organisations are active in the field of leisure and play or whether there is a severe shortage of recreational or creative interventions. We also consider the living conditions at the location, deliberately choosing places where the situation for children is concerning but where our approach is safe and appropriate at that moment.

Education & Awareness

Changing Stories actively collaborates with primary, secondary and higher education institutions in the arts, culture and research sectors. Students not only learn about our mission, vision and methodology but are also provided with a platform to gain practical experience. Through internships, assignments and creative/research projects, they contribute to the (artistic) development of the organisation.

4.1 Goals:

- To measure the impact of our methodology through practice-oriented and academic research, enabling further development and sharing of our methods while actively involving researchers in the field.
- To increase our impact by training and inspiring students and professionals (in the arts and social work domains), offering opportunities for them to gain experience, experiment and develop professionally within this field.
- To inspire the next generation of changemakers: creatives who can use their talents to contribute to the global development goals.

Organisational Structure & Governance

Changing Stories operates in line with the Governance Code for Culture, which provides guidelines for good governance and supervision within cultural organisations. The code is based on principles such as transparency, integrity, independence and accountability. Directors and supervisors act in the interest of the organisation's social and cultural mission. Diversity, ethical conduct and a professional dynamic between management and supervision are essential.

We work with professionally trained teams of theatre-makers, clowns, educators and drama therapists. Diversity in background, colour and gender is a key focus, allowing us to offer children diverse role models. Our projects are always carried out in collaboration with

reliable local partners who ensure safety, access and continuity. We take an explicitly anti-racist stance and are conscious of the white saviour complex.

5.1 Board

The Changing Stories Foundation is led by two directors, who together form the board of the foundation and are responsible for the daily and strategic management of the organisation. They also work as artists within the foundation:

- Linda van der Knaap (Managing Director)
- Lotte Wandel (Artistic Director)

5.2 Supervisory Board

The Supervisory Board holds a controlling and advisory role towards the board. It monitors the implementation of strategy and (multi-year) policy, approves the policy plan, budget and annual report, and advises on the foundation's direction. The board meets four to six times a year and holds an annual development meeting with the directors. Each member contributes their expertise and perspective. The current composition is:

- Magda van Eck (Chair, Education & Research)
- Chantal Berkers (Projects)
- Sjouke Ummels (Safety)
- Melchior Philips (HR Matters)
- Tomas Moerman (Finance)

5.3 Coordination Team

At the time of writing, the coordination team consists of five people, jointly responsible for managing the artists and achieving the foundation's objectives. Coordination tasks are divided across project management, office management, HR, communications and fundraising.

5.4 Professional Artists

Currently, the Changing Stories team comprises 21 professional artists. All artists conducting projects for Changing Stories have a background in theatre or performance and experience working with children. New team members receive thorough training in our methods and are required to complete workshops on trauma and cultural sensitivity. We also organise monthly training sessions to keep the team updated on the context of our work, including lectures and training in European asylum policies, working with various target groups (by age and living situation), clowning and safeguarding.

5.5 Inclusion, Diversity and Equality

The strength of our projects depends on the quality and composition of our team. Therefore, we invest heavily in developing a strong, professional and diverse team, offering children and young people relatable and reliable role models. We strive for balanced distribution of competencies and diversity in gender, age and background.

We also place great importance on social safety in the workplace, with a robust safety plan and a clear complaints protocol. For international projects, we prepare the teams thoroughly to ensure (social) safety, with a focus on resilience, self-care and open communication within the team. After projects, we provide aftercare through a return day, during which the artists' mental wellbeing is discussed.

Partners & Collaborations

6.1 International

We always collaborate with a local partner organisation abroad, which is essential for gaining access to locations and ensuring the safety of our artists. Local partners understand the (cultural) context and have protocols for managing relevant local risks.

6.2 Within the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, we work closely with partner organisations active in emergency reception centres or asylum centres where we operate. We also collaborate locally with municipalities to assess the necessity of our youth projects.

6.3 Education & Research

We collaborate with higher education institutions and secondary schools for internships, creative projects and research assignments. At the time of writing, we are establishing a research partnership with domestic and international partners and researchers from higher education institutions.

Finances & Fundraising

To carry out projects both domestically and internationally, Changing Stories depends on grants. The foundation also generates income from donations and sponsorships, and reception centres in the Netherlands pay a small contribution when Changing Stories runs a project on-site.

We have consciously chosen to invest in progressing towards fair pay for our team. In line with our values, we prioritised moving towards fair pay last year and aim to increase compensations annually. To enable this, financial growth is necessary, and in the coming years, we aim to expand our sponsorships and donations. Grant applications cover our project costs, which will grow proportionally with our output.

Organisation Details

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ANBI Status:

Yes

CBF Recognition:

No