

Stichting

NIDOS

foster families

for unaccompanied underage asylum seekers

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In conclusion: *The uncertain future of unaccompanied underage asylum seekers*

Introduction: *In this brochure we try to give you an as complete a picture as possible of the many aspects of OWG (reception and accommodation in the framework of a foster family) at Stichting Nidos. Should you still have questions or need further explanation after reading this brochure, please do not hesitate to contact us.*

1. Stichting Nidos

Nidos is a national (family) guardianship institution for refugees and asylum seekers. Youth care workers (guardians) of Nidos carry out the guardianship tasks.

The head office is in Utrecht. The guardians work from regional branches established throughout the Netherlands.

Each regional branch has a regional manager and approx. 15 youth care workers. A youth care worker counsels 21-24 children/young people on average.

Nidos does not carry out the daily care of the minors. They live e.g. at institutions such as reception centres of the COA (Central Reception Organisation for Asylum Seekers), youth residential group units (KWG's), small residential units where they are counselled towards independence (KWE's) and families.

The OWG (reception and accommodation in the framework of a foster family) department of Nidos is responsible for the recruitment, screening and matching of foster families for the minors.

1a. Guardianship

Annually many children arrive in the Netherlands unaccompanied by their parents and request asylum. They are forced to leave their country of birth due to undesired circumstances and are also called unaccompanied underage asylum seekers (AMA's).

Commissioned by the Dutch authorities, Nidos acts as guardian for these minors and devotes itself to them.

Nidos is the legal representative of the minors and in that capacity protects their rights. The guardian counsels the minor until he or she has become 18 years old or until the moment that he or she returns to the country of origin.

Nidos helps the AMA's with all kinds of matters that in normal circumstances would be arranged by the parents or family. Dutch lessons, education and social contacts are very important. However, the main thing, of course, is a safe and familiar place to live.

In addition, the guardian looks after the interests of the minors and adjusts and interferes if the situation requires this. The counselling aims to give the minor the opportunity to develop as well as possible and to enable the minor to manage independently when coming of age.

The guardian also monitors correct execution of the asylum proceedings.

1b. Family supervision

Nidos may also be the body executing supervision orders ordered by the juvenile court. This concerns children who arrived in the Netherlands with their parents, in which family large problems relating to the children have arisen. Together with the parents, Nidos tries to solve the problems. Sometimes this means that a child will have to live temporarily in a foster family.

2. The AMA's

Nidos has been charged with the guardianship of virtually all AMA's in the Netherlands. Their ages varies from 0 to 18, but the largest group is 14 or over.

They originate from many continents and countries.

Usually, AMA's fled their country because they felt threatened due to war, chaos, unrest or other bad living conditions.

Some were sent by their parents or family to a safe country.

Others came by themselves by boat, plane or truck. A small part of these children travelled with brothers, sisters or other family, but most of them travelled with a guide or came alone.

2a. The reception of AMA's in the Netherlands

Upon arrival in the Netherlands, the minors report at a reception centre. Here they are registered, after which the asylum proceedings are started. From this place they are transferred as soon as possible to a (usually temporary) reception place.

For children up to the age of 12 this is preferably a foster family, but if this is not possible, it will be a residential unit for children.

For older minors this will be a residential group for children or a reception centre.

Minors who came to the Netherlands together with adult family members, will go to an asylum seeker centre, together with those family members.

If minors have family living in the Netherlands, we aim at early reunion. If reunion with family is not an option, another suitable place will be looked for.

During the stay at the first reception place, the asylum proceedings are continued and a medical examination takes

place. In addition, guardianship is applied for and matters such as school, medical provisions and insurances are arranged.

Besides, we consider which the best next living arrangement for this minor is. Preference will always be given in such case to placement with family, but if this is not possible, placement in a family with the same or a related culture is preferred.

2b. The asylum proceedings

Upon arrival in the Netherlands, the children/young people apply for asylum. A lawyer assists them in this. Based on the interviews and any additional information, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) examines if a minor has an entitlement to temporary residence.

It may be a long time before a minor knows if he or she is allowed to stay.

Sometimes a granted entitlement to temporary residence is withdrawn. This is the case, for example, if entitlement to temporary residence has been obtained because of an unsafe situation in the country of origin or because of lack of relief there. If the situation changes, e.g. because the country is safe again or because relief is found for a minor there, entitlement to temporary residence may be withdrawn.

In the background, the uncertainty around the asylum proceedings often play an important part in the life of the minor. The rejection of entitlement to temporary residence, for example, may cause unrest. In addition, travelling to countries outside the Netherlands for a holiday is not an obvious possibility.

3. Reception and accommodation in the framework of a foster family

3a. Background

Before Nidos started recruiting foster families, it used foster families from the pool of youth care. However, these families did not always appear suitable for the reception of AMA's. The AMA's appeared to need different care than the minors whom youth care was dealing with.

It is a special group of young people. On the one hand, they have experienced much, but on the other hand they have often known 'normal' family life, which gives them a good basis for development. This good basis, however, has been disturbed by war or another threatening situation.

In principle, we see AMA's as 'normal' young people who have landed in 'abnormal' circumstances.

This requires a specific manner of acceptance, aimed at learning to deal with:

- the lack and loss of family;
- unpleasant, sometimes traumatic, experiences;
- the lack of the own country;
- the uncertain future in the Netherlands;
- the new culture with new habits, rules and a different language.

As a rule, educational problems are less important in this context.

3b. State of affairs

Many young people for whom Nidos is the guardian, live in a family. Nidos has foster families throughout the country. Most of the families are of immigrant origin, but the pool also contains families of Dutch origin.

3c. The conditions for foster parents

Nidos is looking for families/single persons who are prepared to take a young person into their homes for a short or longer period. Families of the same culture have preference.

They must be able to offer the young person at least the following:

- safety and security;
- adequate care and education;
- contact with the family and/or culture;
- stimulation of the personal development.

In addition:

- they must be able to deal with an uncertain residence perspective: integration or return;
- all family members must be behind the placement;
- the living conditions must be stable;
- cooperation with Nidos is required;
- a foster parent should not have committed a sex offence or a violent offence;
- foster parents should be sufficiently physically and mentally healthy to take care of a minor.

There are no demands as to the size of the house, the height of the income or the composition of the family. However, Nidos must be sure that the family is safe and suitable to the minors.

4. Forms of foster care

Nidos is looking for first foster families, foster families for short-term reception and foster families for a longer period. In addition, Nidos is looking for ‘attention rooms’.

Host families are also welcome.

4a. First foster families

In principle, children of up to 12 years old are placed in a first foster family immediately after their arrival. From here, the asylum proceedings will be started, a medical examination will take place and guardianship will be applied for. From here, we shall also consider where a child will live definitively. This may be with a long-term foster family.

A family registering for the first reception must realise that:

- the child usually does not yet speak Dutch;
- nothing is known yet about the character of the child;
- the medical examination has not yet taken place;
- the family will have to undertake/start many things with the child.

4b. Short-term foster care

Short-term foster care is offered for all occurring crisis cases, e.g. due to practical living problems or social problems. The duration of this care is six weeks, in principle.

4c. Long-term foster families

These families are prepared to take care of a minor until:

- he or she must or want to return to the country of origin;
- he or she is reunited with his or her family;
- he or she is sufficiently adult to live independently.

4d. Attention rooms

For AMA's who are already rather independent we look for people who are prepared to lease a room and, in addition, give some care and attention varying from being prepared to listen to helping to cook or to fill in forms.

In the case of 'attention rooms', the minor usually manages the money and pays 'board' to the foster parents. This may affect the rental subsidy or the social benefit.

4e. Foster families

For minors who have already a reception place, it may sometimes be desirable to stay occasionally in different surroundings where they receive special attention and where they can make other contacts.

A foster parent can provide this. Often it concerns reception during the weekend or during holidays.

A host family will not receive financial compensation.

5. The role of the guardian

A minor will remain under the guardianship of Nidos until the age of 18. A guardian, therefore, will visit the family and the minor regularly to see if everything in respect of the minor passes as desired. If this is not the case, the guardian, in consultation with the persons involved, will consider what can be done. The guardian is not a social welfare worker. The guardian has an identifying, referring and coordinating task and is responsible for the minor.

6. Finances

Foster parents receive a monthly care compensation to pay for the cost of the care of the minor. The amount of the compensation depends on the age of the minor. In addition, some cost is compensated, such as those for school. This is set out in a financial guide that will be handed to you.

The care compensation is a compensation for cost and is not considered income. The reception of a minor, therefore, does not affect the height of your benefits or rental subsidy.

Any arrangements in respect of the counselling, cooperation and spending of the care money are laid down in a contract.

In the case of ‘attention rooms’, the minor usually manages the money and pays ‘board’ to the foster parents. This may affect the height of the social benefit and/or the rental subsidy.

A foster family will not receive financial compensation.

You will not be entitled to child allowance for the minors you foster.

7. The proceedings for foster parents

7a. Informative meeting

If you are interested in being a foster family, you can register by phone or in writing at OWG (reception and accommodation in the framework of a foster family).

The OWG officer will set a meeting with you. You will receive explanation about Nidos, the minors and foster parenthood. Of course, you can also ask any questions you have.

If there is a positive feeling on both sides, a second meeting is set for a screening.

7b. The screening

At one or more meetings, an OWG officer will extensively discuss matters with you like the education, your living conditions, your background, your motivation and your attitude towards other cultures. But also themes like return to the country of origin, surgery and numerous other subjects may be discussed. The officer will also discuss your preference for any specific form of reception.

All this will be recorded in a report. This report should be a proper reflection of your family situation and your ideas.

7c. Certificate of No Objection

In addition, the issue of the 'Certificate of No Objection' by the Child Care and Protection Board is a condition for

eligibility for foster parenthood. To this end, the Justitieel Documentatie Register request, amongst other things, information from the Child Care and Protection Board. You give your permission for this with an authorization form.

As soon as the screening has been completed positively and the 'Certificate of No Objection' has been issued by the Child Care and Protection Board, you will be included officially in the families' pool.

8. Matching and placement

8a. Matching

Via an application form, the guardian applies for placement of a minor in a family.

The OWG officer will examine then which family suits the minor in question best, taking into account, amongst other things, a good match in background, attitude to life and religion, but especially the 'click' that may be expected. Where one child may feel right at home, another child may not feel well. In addition, practical matters, such as the distance to any present family in the Netherlands, the location of the apartment or house and the composition of the family are taken into consideration.

Good and careful matching is very important.

8b. Placement

When the OWG officer has found a suitable family, the officer will discuss this with the guardian. The guardian will decide if the minor should meet the family in question. If this is the case, the OWG officer will contact the family to ask if this family is also positive about possible placement of the minor. If all parties are positive, the guardian, in consultation with the family, will plan a meeting between the minor and the family. If desired, the meeting process may be extended.

If this process has taken place to the satisfaction of all parties, the guardian will arrange everything for the effective placement.

9. Counselling

During the placement in a family, Nidos will remain responsible for the minor. This means that the guardian will take care of all matters that go beyond the daily care and for all future-oriented matters, such as asylum proceedings, registration at a health insurance and choice of school.

The family will be responsible for the daily matters. Of course, matters are usually done in mutual consultation.

In principle, a guardian visits a family once every four weeks to see how the placement is developing. If there are problem areas, the guardian will look for solutions in consultation with the family. The task of the guardian is not just to supervise the care for the child, but also to support the foster parents.

The arrangements between the foster parents and Nidos will be laid down in a(n) (OWG) contract.

10. Contact with the OWG officer

In principle, the work of an OWG officer stops after the placement of a minor. Subsequently, the guardian will arrange everything and maintain the contact with the family. The guardian keeps the OWG officer informed via evaluations.

The OWG officer will still visit you to see how the placement is working out and to ask you if you were sufficiently prepared for the placement. After completion of a placement, the OWG officer will also contact you to see how the placement has worked out and what the desires and points for attention are for any next placement.

In conclusion:

It is uncertain for many of our minors if they will be allowed to continue living in the Netherlands. In the end, a large number of them will have to return to the country of origin, even if the circumstances there are sometimes uncertain. The Immigration and Naturalization Service is the body deciding on this. The guardian and the family have no influence in this matter.

Sometimes family arrives in the Netherlands unexpectedly. In that case, Nidos makes an effort to reunite the minor with his or her family.

We hope that foster parents can handle these uncertainties and are able to give a minor a strong basis for coping with the uncertain future. We also hope that foster parents are able to support a minor in this aspect.

We emphasize that foster parenthood is not adoption.

*N.B. Where we use the term *unaccompanied underage asylum seekers (AMA's)* in this brochure, we refer to any unaccompanied underage foreigner who fled his or her country of origin.*

If you are interested in foster parenthood and you wish to receive additional information, call then the below-mentioned telephone number or send this filled-in form to us.

NAME :

ADDRESS :

POSTAL CODE :

PLACE :

NATIONALITY :

TELEPHONE :

O I would like to meet someone of your staff for an informative talk without commitment.

**Nidos
Attn. Opvang en Wonen in Gezinsverband
Postbus 13021
3507 LA Utrecht
Tel 030-2391200
Fax 030-2391290**

This is the central postal address. The staff works throughout the country.