



## The Role and Position of Volunteers in Ouders in Actie

An early pedagogic intervention

Lucia Thielman

2590447

Management Policy-analysis and Entrepreneurship in  
Health and Life Sciences

Supervisors:

Toine Wentink

Jantine van Rijckevorsel-Scheele

Pim Klaassen

© Onderzoek en Business Intelligence (OBI)

E-mail: [onderzoek@rotterdam.nl](mailto:onderzoek@rotterdam.nl)

Website: [www.rotterdam.nl/onderzoek](http://www.rotterdam.nl/onderzoek)



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## Summary

### Introduction & background

The youth care transformation initiated in 2015 has led to changes in the role and position of volunteers. Therefore, insights in relevant perspectives towards these new roles and positions may be valuable. To aid this transformation, the current study aims to gain insights in the perceived role and position of volunteers in Ouders in Actie (OiA) a volunteer-led parent support group intervention. OiA aims at increasing the strength of informal support systems and at preventing youth and family issues in Rotterdam by engaging volunteers to organize parent support groups in Rotterdam. Accordingly, the research question answered here reads: *how is the role and position of volunteers in OiA perceived by relevant stakeholders?* Relevant stakeholders interviewed in the current study include employees of the centre for youth and family involved with organization of the intervention, social professionals responsible for recruiting, training and supporting the volunteers and the volunteers.

### Methodology

To answer the main research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted and relevant documents, such as documents related to the training, were analysed. The interviews were conducted with members of the aforementioned stakeholder groups, using a fluid topic guide based on the conceptual framework. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. All data was analysed using a directed content analysis approach.

### Discussion & conclusion

Results of the current study indicate that the role and position of the volunteers in OiA was perceived similar for most stakeholders as it comprised providing low-threshold parenting support by facilitating conversations between parents. Furthermore, results suggest that the employment of volunteers was considered a solution to the issue that some parents do not trust professionals and are more likely to open up in the presence of a volunteer. Consequently, the most important responsibility of these volunteers was focused on providing a safe and open space in which parents are comfortable in sharing experiences. In this approach to the issue, volunteers seemed to serve as extenders of formal aid. Successful volunteers needed to have a significant network, a position in this network and be competent enough to lead these groups. The motivation to become a volunteer included doing more for the community and personal development.

Although no significant discrepancies were found in the perceived role and position of the volunteers difficulties were experienced by the professionals training and supporting the volunteers. These



difficulties were related to recruiting and retaining volunteers. Reasons for these difficulties included role confusion for the professionals, the perceived non-committal nature of volunteer, lack of adequate selection resulting in role overload for volunteers and a mismatch in motivation of the volunteers. In order to successfully execute the intervention participants expressed increased collaboration with other organizations such as schools and community centres would be necessary. Although difficulties were experienced, the current study did suggest that OiA is able to increase the problem-solving ability of the participants, strengthen informal support networks and recognize the value of volunteers in pedagogic services. Such interventions could thus potentially prove valuable in transforming youth care, provided that other aspects of the pedagogic service system properly collaborate and coordinate their services.

## **Recommendations**

From the current study the following recommendations can be made.

- Explicit role description for professionals regarding coordination of the volunteers. This includes regular (informal) meetings, active supporting volunteers by using their own network, accurately following the prescribed selection procedure to check if potential volunteers are suitable, installing performance evaluations to check how volunteers are functioning within their role.
- Increased collaboration and coordination with other welfare organizations by making them aware of the intervention and the value of the volunteers.
- Also employ volunteers in functioning as a bridge between informal and formal systems to aid in timely detection of serious youth and family issues.



## Nederlandse samenvatting

### Introductie & achtergrond

De jeugdzorg transformatie van 2015 heeft gezorgd voor veranderingen in de rol en positie van vrijwilligers. Het is daarom waardevol om inzicht te krijgen in relevante perspectieven op deze nieuwe rollen en posities. De huidige studie probeert bij te dragen aan deze transformatie door inzicht te krijgen in de rol en positie van vrijwilligers in Ouders in Actie (OiA) een interventie waarbij vrijwilligers bijeenkomsten organiseren voor ouders. OiA heeft als doel de informele ondersteuningsnetwerken te versterken en het voorkomen van jeugd en familieproblemen. Dit wordt gedaan door vrijwilligers te betrekken en hen ouder bijeenkomsten te laten organiseren in Rotterdam. De onderzoeksvraag van de huidige studie is als volgt: *Hoe wordt de rol en positie van vrijwilligers in OiA ervaren en gezien door relevante stakeholders?* Stakeholders relevant voor deze studie waren medewerkers van het Centrum Jeugd en Gezin (CJG), verantwoordelijk voor het organiseren van de interventie, sociale professionals verantwoordelijk voor het werven, trainen en ondersteunen van de vrijwilligers en de vrijwilligers zelf.

### Methode

De onderzoeksvraag werd beantwoord door semigestructureerde interviews te houden en relevante documenten te analyseren. De interviews werden gehouden met de eerdergenoemde stakeholder groepen. Interviews werden opgenomen en woordelijk getranscribeerd. Alle data werd vervolgens geanalyseerd met een directed content aanpak.

### Discussie & conclusie

De resultaten van de huidige studie laten zien dat alle stakeholder groepen de rol en positie hetzelfde ervaren en zien, bestaande uit het organiseren van laagdrempelige ouderondersteuning door het faciliteren van gesprekken tussen ouders. Bovendien suggereren de resultaten dat de inzet van vrijwilligers wordt gezien als een oplossing op het probleem dat sommige ouders professionals niet vertrouwen en meer geneigd zijn zich open te stellen bij een vrijwilliger. Zodoende was de belangrijkste verantwoordelijkheid van deze vrijwilligers een veilige en open plek te creëren waarin ouders zich comfortabel genoeg voelen om hun ervaringen te delen. Vrijwilligers waren zo een uitbreiding van de professionele ondersteuning. Succesvolle vrijwilligers hadden een significant netwerk nodig, een positie in dit netwerk en competent genoeg zijn om deze bijeenkomsten te leiden. De motivatie om een vrijwilliger te worden was onder andere meer te betekenen voor de gemeenschap of persoonlijke ontwikkeling.

De betrokken professionals verantwoordelijk voor het trainen en ondersteunen van de vrijwilligers gaven aan moeilijkheden te ervaren in het werven en behouden van vrijwilligers. Redenen hiervoor



waren de rol verwarring voor deze professionals, gezien zij hun rol in het ondersteunen van de vrijwilligers en het organiseren van ouderondersteuning niet altijd als kerntaak opvatten. Daarnaast waren de vrijblijvendheid van vrijwilligerswerk en de rol overbelasting voor de vrijwilligers mogelijk een reden voor de ervaren moeilijkheden. Participanten noemden een aantal oplossingen voor deze moeilijkheden zoals meer samenwerking met andere organisaties zoals scholen en buurthuizen bij bijvoorbeeld het werven en organiseren van ouderbijeenkomsten. Ondanks deze moeilijkheden laat deze studie wel zien dat OiA in staat is de informele ondersteuningsnetwerken te versterken en dat de inzet van vrijwilligers in pedagogische dienstverlening toegevoegde waarde heeft. Zulke interventies hebben dus de potentie om bij te dragen aan de jeugdzorg transformatie.

## **Aanbevelingen**

Op basis van dit onderzoek kunnen de volgende aanbevelingen worden gedaan:

- Meer expliciete rol beschrijving voor het coördineren van de vrijwilligers voor professionals. Inclusief regelmatige (informele) bijeenkomsten met de vrijwilligers, actieve ondersteuning van de vrijwilligers door inzet van het eigen netwerk, accuraat opvolgen van de voorgeschreven selectiecriteria, functioneringsgesprekken met vrijwilligers inzetten om te onderzoeken hoe zij in hun rol functioneren.
- Versterken van samenwerking en coördinatie met andere welzijnsorganisaties door hen te wijzen op de waarde van vrijwilligers en de interventie zelf.
- Zet vrijwilligers meer in als een brug tussen informele en formele systemen om bij te dragen aan tijdige detectie van ernstige jeugd en familieproblemen.



# 1 Introduction

The introduction of the law on youth care (Jeugdwet) marked 2015 as a critical year regarding reforms in the Dutch pedagogic sector. First, reforms in how youth care is provided have focused on decentralizing welfare tasks from provincial government towards municipalities in an attempt to allow customized support for its citizens. This is based on the idea that municipalities are closer to their citizens and organisations providing professional support than the provincial government and its executive offices are, and thus better informed about citizens' needs ("Beleidsplan Nieuw Rotterdams Jeugdinstel," 2015). Second, the focus has shifted away from intensive and specialized support led by professionals after problems have already manifested, towards a more informal support system that is increasingly focused on prevention. Municipalities are thus expected to increase the strength of such informal support systems and effectively implement preventive pedagogic interventions that fit within this new legal framework (Linders, Feringa, Potting, & Jager-Vreugdenhil, 2016; van Bochove, Tonkens, & Verplanke, 2013). In short, these changes are aimed at decreasing the layers of bureaucracy and would ideally lead to the prevention or timely detection of serious youth and family problems. Eventually leading to a decrease in costs (Linders et al., 2016; "Transitie jeugdzorg: een overzicht | Movisie," n.d.).

As a result of these reforms and the increased focus on prevention and informal support systems in the pedagogic sector, changes in the roles for actors in this sector will also be inevitable. Most notably is the increased weight and responsibility that is put on informal actors, such as volunteers ("Beleidsplan Nieuw Rotterdams Jeugdinstel," 2015; Linders et al., 2016; van Bochove et al., 2013). Informal actors are now expected to take the lead, to build upon and increase the strength of citizens. The formal actors, social professionals such as pedagogues, social workers or school nurses, should observe at a distance and intervene only when absolutely necessary (Linders et al., 2016). Unfortunately, these expectations of policy makers do not necessarily align with expectations and abilities of the actors who must execute the policy. As previous research has indicated, role confusion, fragmentation in the pedagogic field, irreconcilable perspectives and visions are present in the sector (Linders et al., 2016; van Bochove et al., 2013; van Daal, Winsemius, & Plemper, 2005). All these factors hinder effective implementation of the new laws and should be managed by municipalities.

To prevent such ineffective implementation and aid this transformation of the pedagogic sector, academic networks ("academische werkplaatsen") funded by ZonMW were introduced in 12 municipalities in The Netherlands including Rotterdam. These networks comprise policy makers, researchers and executive professionals who work together to gain insights in how to effectively transform the pedagogic sector (ZonMw, 2014). In this way, these networks aim to provide the



transformation in youth care with a scientific evidence base and ensure integration and dissemination of this knowledge in policy and education. In addition, the academic networks are tasked by ZonMW to construct sustainable collaboration between the stakeholders in these networks to ensure high quality youth care in The Netherlands (ZonMw, 2014). In Rotterdam specifically the academic network, ST-RAW, is focused on prevention, early detection of youth and family issues and the transforming role of executive professionals in the new pedagogic sector (Jansen).

One intervention studied by this academic network in Rotterdam is Ouders in Actie (OiA). OiA is aimed at increasing the strength of informal support systems and prevent youth and family issues in Rotterdam by employing volunteers to organize parent support groups in Rotterdam. The idea behind this intervention is that it provides an environment in which parenting issues can be discussed, potentially preventing escalation of youth and family issues. In addition, these specialized volunteers may be able to guide parents in finding the right professional support (Lecluijze, 2012). Although initiated seven years before the introduction of the new youth care law this intervention fits perfectly in the new legal framework and thus provides an opportunity to investigate how the roles of actors in the pedagogic sector may be transformed. Therefore, the main aim of the current study is to aid in transforming the roles of actors in the new pedagogic sector by investigating the perceptions on the role and position of volunteers in OiA an early pedagogic intervention. Accordingly, the research question addressed in this paper is *how is the role and position of volunteers in OiA perceived by relevant stakeholders?* To answer the main research question, relevant stakeholders were identified and semi-structured interviews conducted.



## 2 Contextual background

In this section important topics will be discussed that are essential to understanding the context of the research. This includes understanding the organization and reforms of youth care in Rotterdam, the OiA intervention and the relevant stakeholders for the intervention.

### 2.1 Transforming youth care

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, in 2015 the new Jeugdwet was introduced in The Netherlands. Most notable in this new law were the following five aspects:

- (1) prevention, individual responsibility and possibilities of youth, parents and their social networks are now crucial;
- (2) demedicalising and normalizing parenting issues by strengthening the pedagogic climate in families, neighbourhoods and schools;
- (3) early and tailored support to youth and families as quickly, as close and as efficient as possible with attention for (cost) effectiveness;
- (4) integral aid for families provided from one central institution such as a district team;
- (5) more room and resources for professionals to provide adequate care by decreasing work pressure ("Jeugdwet," 2014; "Jeugdwet - Transformatie jeugdhulp | NJi,").

In addition, the introduction of this new law shifted most responsibilities for youth and family care from the provincial states to the municipalities ("Jeugdwet," 2014; "Jeugdwet - Transformatie jeugdhulp | NJi,") The municipality of Rotterdam used these transitions as an opportunity to reorganize youth care in the city according to the conditions set by the national government ("Beleidsplan Nieuw Rotterdams Jeugdstelsel," 2015).

### 2.2 Schematic representation of youth care in Rotterdam

To further understand the transformations in youth care, this section provides a schematic representation of youth care in Rotterdam. From a policy perspective, two formal lines of youth care can be distinguished. (i) What is called the "first line" of care can be seen as the services every citizen has access to and for which no indication from a professional is needed. These include the child consultation clinic, the school doctor or centre for youth and family. (ii) The "second line" care concerns more intensive and specialized care and includes more serious clinical interventions such as intramural care and judicial interventions as well as the youth care bureau (Janssens, 2015). For second line care an indication from the first line is needed. Outside of these two formal "lines of care" is a "third line of care" which is provided outside of the formal care institutions and can be referred to as the "zero-line care".

For youth care “zero-line care” this refers to the pedagogic environment in which children and youth are growing up and the direct support that they are offered. This includes the immediate environment of the families such as neighbourhoods and schools, but it also includes the services for mild support. “Zero line care” can thus prevent escalation of support questions to actual serious issues and normalize parenting issues. In the new youth care system and transformations in Rotterdam this last kind of support has received specific attention and the focus has been shifted from first and second line care to zero line care (“Beleidsplan Nieuw Rotterdams Jeugdstelsel,” 2015). Figure 1. provides a schematic overview and an estimation of the costs of the three lines of care that can be distinguished in Rotterdam (Anschutz et al., 2016).

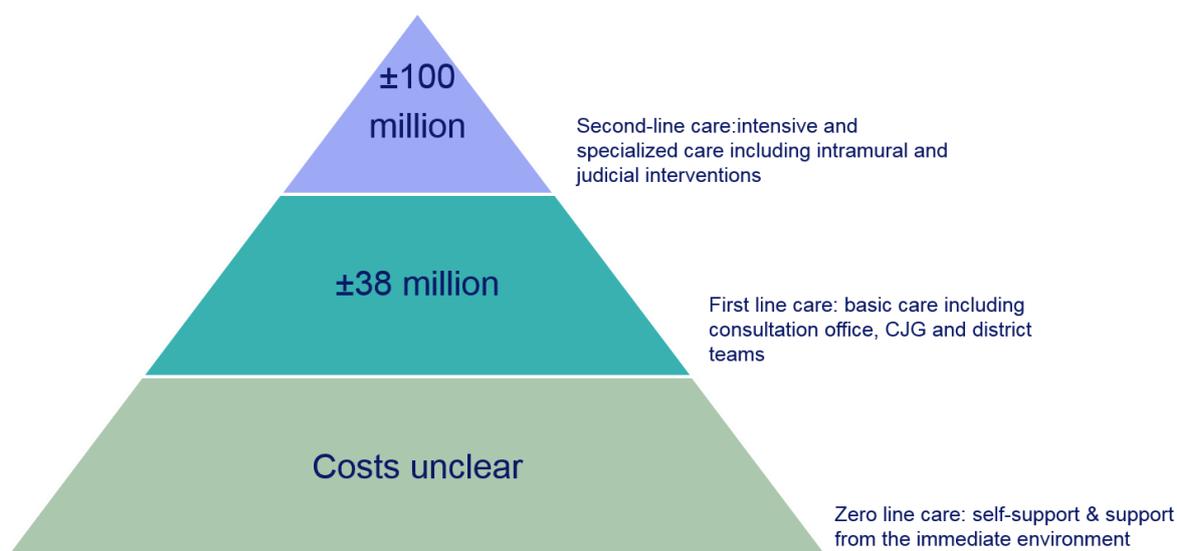


Figure 1, Youth care pyramid

### 2.3 Academic network for youth care: ST-RAW

In concordance with the new national policy and the reorganization of youth care 12 academic networks (academische werkplaatsen) were funded by ZonMW to aid in transforming the youth care sector (ZonMw, 2014). These academic networks are comprised of executive social professionals, policy makers and researchers who together work towards improving youth care and finding solutions to issues associated with the transformation in the sector. They do this by collecting and sharing knowledge from municipalities, welfare organizations, universities and citizens. In turn this collected knowledge is made widely accessible through symposia, reports and integration in education for new social professionals. This will aid in translating research and experience into policy and practice. In addition, these networks work towards sustainable collaboration of actors working in youth care service delivery. All academic networks work towards improving and transforming youth care but do have



distinct goals per municipality ("Transformatie Jeugdhulp, Academische Werkplaatsen," ; ZonMw, 2014)

In Rotterdam, the academic network for youth care is called ST-RAW and specifically aims at gaining insights and knowledge on the following three transformation goals:

1. Prevention and own strength of youth and families
2. Accurate care for families as early as possible to prevent escalation of support questions
3. Create space for social professionals to transition into their new and changing role

ST-RAW is comprised of policy advisors of CJG and municipality Rotterdam, researchers from the university of applied science, the municipality and Erasmus MC and executive professionals employed by the CJG and welfare organizations (Jansen; "Over ST-RAW,").

## **2.4 Ouders in Actie intervention**

As mentioned one of the interventions studied by ST-RAW is the OiA intervention. OiA can be considered an informal volunteer-led parent support group intervention. The intervention was initiated in 2008 and is focused on providing low-threshold parenting support and employ a more outreaching strategy (Lecluijze, 2012). Additional goals include stimulating meetings between individuals, facilitating parent discussions about raising children and strengthening the pedagogic civil society (Lecluijze, 2012). In addition, the intervention is aimed at facilitating parent groups involving individuals from a single social network with often the same cultural background (Lecluijze, 2012). The parent support groups are led by volunteers that are trained by a professionals working in the pedagogic sector such as pedagogues or social workers. The following sections explain the coordination, the training and the volunteer characteristics in more detail.

## **2.5 Coordination of the OiA intervention**

The intervention is organized and coordinated by two project leaders employed by the CJG and other social professionals employed by welfare organizations in different areas of Rotterdam. The CJG is responsible for coordinating the intervention for the whole of Rotterdam by providing the training materials for volunteers and by supporting the social professionals at welfare organizations. These social professionals are in turn the ones responsible for recruiting, training and supporting the volunteers in the area they work in. In OiA these professionals are referred to as co-trainers. I will also use this term in the rest of the report. The idea behind employing these co-trainers is that they are closer to the citizens and only work within a specific area, making it easier for them to recruit, train and coordinate the volunteers. Currently there are ten co-trainers employed by the intervention working in 10 different areas in Rotterdam.



## 2.6 Recruitment and training of the volunteers

As mentioned, the volunteers leading the support groups are trained by professionals, the co-trainers. This training is based on teaching the volunteers how to organize and lead these support groups. The training consists of 4 half-day training meetings with the co-trainer. Afterwards, the volunteers organize 3 coaching groups in which they can practice and receive feedback from the co-trainer. After completing the training, the parent receives a certificate and should be able to conduct and facilitate parent support groups themselves. The volunteers do receive a USB containing basic information on several parenting themes. They can receive additional support such as supervision and coaching on the job once they start organizing the support groups (Lecluijze, 2012). The CJG also provides so called expertise meetings for the volunteers, in which they can get additional information about parenting topics that are currently relevant. These include for example radicalization or social media. Individuals who wish to become volunteers for OiA have to meet certain criteria. These include the following:

1. Potential volunteers can read and understand Dutch sufficiently to follow the training.
2. Potential volunteers stand by the democratic parenting style. In shorts this means that they positively support their children but incorporate rules and boundaries.
3. Potential volunteers recognize and acknowledge the experiences of parents and have realistic expectations of parents.
4. Potential volunteers propagate that parents can be proud of themselves and that they should take care of themselves.
5. Potential volunteers can apply the listen, summarize and question method
6. The potential volunteers are interested and motivated, can organize, bind and recruit.

Potential volunteers need to meet all criteria in order to be accepted for the training.

## 2.7 Volunteer characteristics

Most volunteers are mothers between 30 and 40 years old. They usually have children in the primary school age. Volunteers come from a variety of nationalities including Iraqi, Moroccan, Turkish and Dutch. They are all from different areas of Rotterdam, as are the co-trainers. Most of these women have at least some form of higher education, such as a secondary vocational education.

## 2.8 Network of relevant stakeholders and their relationships

In sum, the relevant stakeholders involved in organizing and executing the intervention can be considered the following: the employees from the CJG, the co-trainers working at welfare



organizations, volunteers, parents and the municipality. These relevant stakeholders are connected through four different types of relationships towards each other. The different types include (i) subsidy in that the municipality provides funds towards the CJG and the welfare organizations according to public procurement. This leads to (ii) the second type of relationship, accountability, as welfare organizations and the CJG need to justify how they used this subsidy. (iii) The third type of relationship concerns advice & support, this is provided by the CJG to the co-trainers by facilitating them in recruiting and training the volunteers. This type of relationship is also found for volunteers who provide advice & support regarding parenting issues towards the participants of the support groups. In turn participants may provide similar advice and support towards each other. (iiii) A last type of relationship can be found in that co-trainers provide training and support towards the volunteers. This means that they provide the training as discussed above and that they support the volunteers when they start organizing the support groups. This support may for example be finding a space to organize the support groups or aid in finding participants for the groups. Lastly, the line connecting co-trainers to welfare organizations represents the fact that they are employed there and therefore does not represent a relationship. Figure 2 presents a schematic overview of the relevant stakeholders and their relationships towards each other.

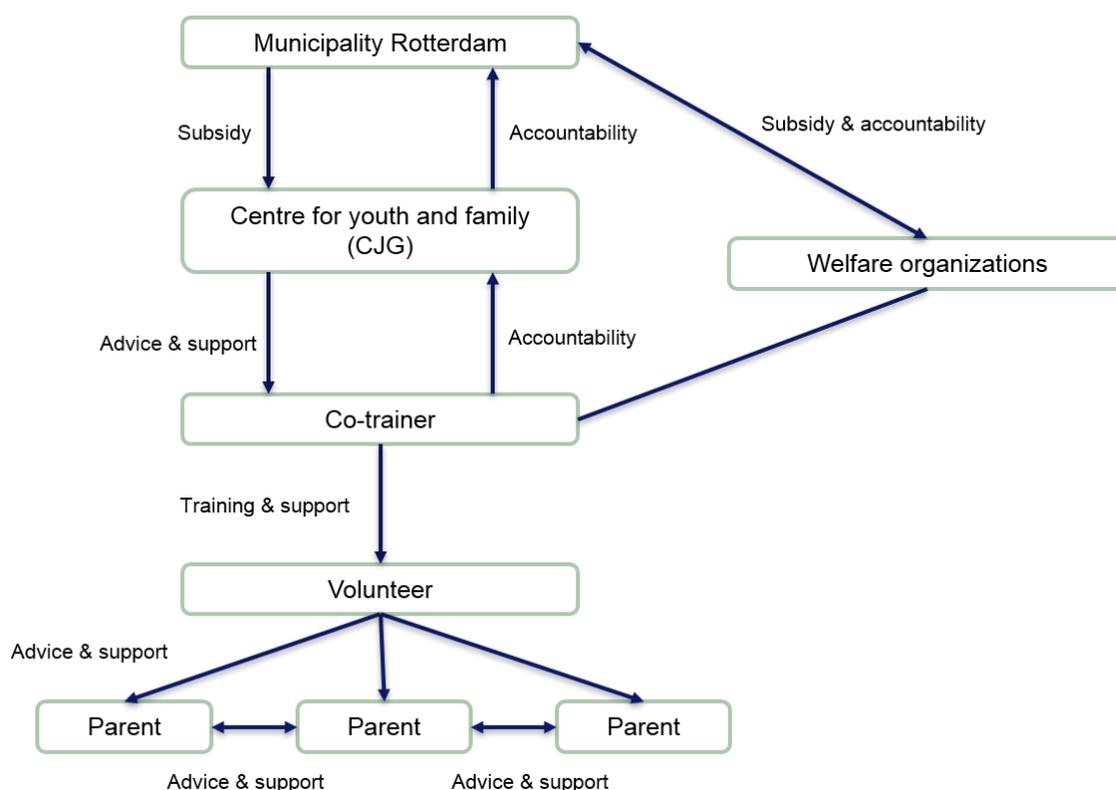


Figure 2, map of relevant stakeholders and their relationship to each other





### 3 Theoretical background

Three useful theoretical perspectives will be discussed that aid in modelling the role and position of the volunteers in OiA. These include the perspective based on *the governance network theory and the resource dependency theory*, the perspective determined by *the role theory* and the perspective determined by *co-constructive interactional frames* and previous research in The Netherlands (Biddle, 1986; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012; Ponzoni, 2015; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Rein & Schön, 1996; Torfing, 2005).

First, *the governance network theory and resource dependency theory* are useful, as they position the intervention, and thus its actors, in the network for pedagogic service delivery. They do so by recognizing that collaboration and interaction are consequences of actors' recognition that they have shared goals, but that none of the actors has sufficient resources to reach these goals (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012; Torfing, 2005). To further explain effective collaboration and interaction in these networks both theories then describe various relevant factors. Such factors include goal consensus, domain consensus, positive evaluation and work coordination. Goal and domain consensus refer to the agreement among participants regarding the appropriate role and scope of an agency and the associated approach to those tasks. Positive evaluation refers more to the judgment of participants towards the value of the work of each other's work. Work coordination describes patterns of collaboration and cooperation between organizations and refers to activities that aim to maximize effectiveness and efficiency of the interactions (Provan & Kenis, 2008; San Martín-Rodríguez, Beaulieu, D'Amour, & Ferrada-Videla, 2005). If we assume this theory as valid, we can use it to view the role and position of these volunteers as determined by interaction and collaboration with the other actors in the network and thus a result of the factors described above.

Second, the role theory is useful as it adds an extra dimension to explaining interaction and collaboration between the stakeholders of the intervention. Namely because this theory describes a role as being a result of expectations shared by associated actors (Biddle, 1986; Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010) Accordingly roles can be defined as a result of social interaction, shared norms or contextual demands. These normative expectations can then come from various sources such as informal groups and organizational demands (Biddle, 1986). In addition, this theory defines the consequences of misalignment of these normative expectations as role strain, referring to the unsuccessful fulfilment of a role (Goode, 1960). Using this theory as an addition to the ones previously discussed we can also view the role and position of these volunteers as a result of expectations, based



on social norms and organizational demands, from the various stakeholders involved in the intervention. In sum this would conclude that the role & position of the volunteers in OiA is a result of interaction and collaboration with, as well as expectations of involved stakeholders.

A last useful theoretical perspective concerns that determined by previous research in The Netherlands and the concept of *interactional co-constructive frames* (Rein & Schön, 1996). This last concept refers to the ways in which actors make sense of relationships and interactions around them. This theory also dictates that conflict between actors arises from misalignment of frames and that resolving conflicts lies primarily in finding new alignments through interactions between individuals (Dewulf et al., 2009). In previous research two of such frames have been described that are useful in the current study: the frame of access and the frame of shared spaces (Ponzoni, 2015). The frame of access refers to *“the importance of making professional services accessible to all citizens, regardless of their cultural or socioeconomic background”* (Ponzoni, 2015). This frame is characterized by a metaphorical gap between professional services and the vulnerable citizen and proposes that the informal actor (or volunteer) can build a bridge between those two (Gruijter, Pels, & Tan, 2009; Ponzoni, 2012). The other frame proposes that volunteers, among other actors such as professionals, create a network of support in which social issues, such as parenting issues can be resolved. This frame proposes a different role and position for the volunteer as within this frame they are more focused on increasing the problem solving ability of parents by facilitating interaction (Ponzoni, 2015).

To translate these abstract theories to the current study, previous Dutch literature provides evidence of these theoretical perspectives. First, the factors described above in the governance network and resource dependency theories are similar to conditions set forth for successful collaboration in the pedagogic sector. These include having regular informal contact with, being flexible and showing appreciation to the volunteers (Keinemans & Kloppenburg, 2016; Ponzoni, 2012; van Bochove et al., 2013). In addition, development of a training for volunteers or developing a shared vision may be useful in developing constructive collaboration (Ponzoni, 2012; van Bochove et al., 2013). Regarding the role theory, evidence of role strain is evident as research indicates that both professionals and volunteers are uncertain about what their role is in this new social domain and what tasks they are allowed or supposed to carry out. Lastly, van Bochove (2014) explicitly states the need to investigate the cooperation and responsibility structures between volunteers and professionals as these can be different for different interventions.

## 4 Conceptual framework

The theoretical perspectives discussed indicate that the role and position is created within a network of stakeholders and determined by interaction, collaboration and expectations within this network. Interaction and collaboration can then be further unravelled in four sub-concepts described above that together determine the role and position of these volunteers. These categories included vision and goals, domain, evaluation and work coordination. Operationalization of each of the sub-concepts was done according to the description and theoretical substantiation of the intervention discussed in the contextual background. A visualization of the framework can be found in figure 3.

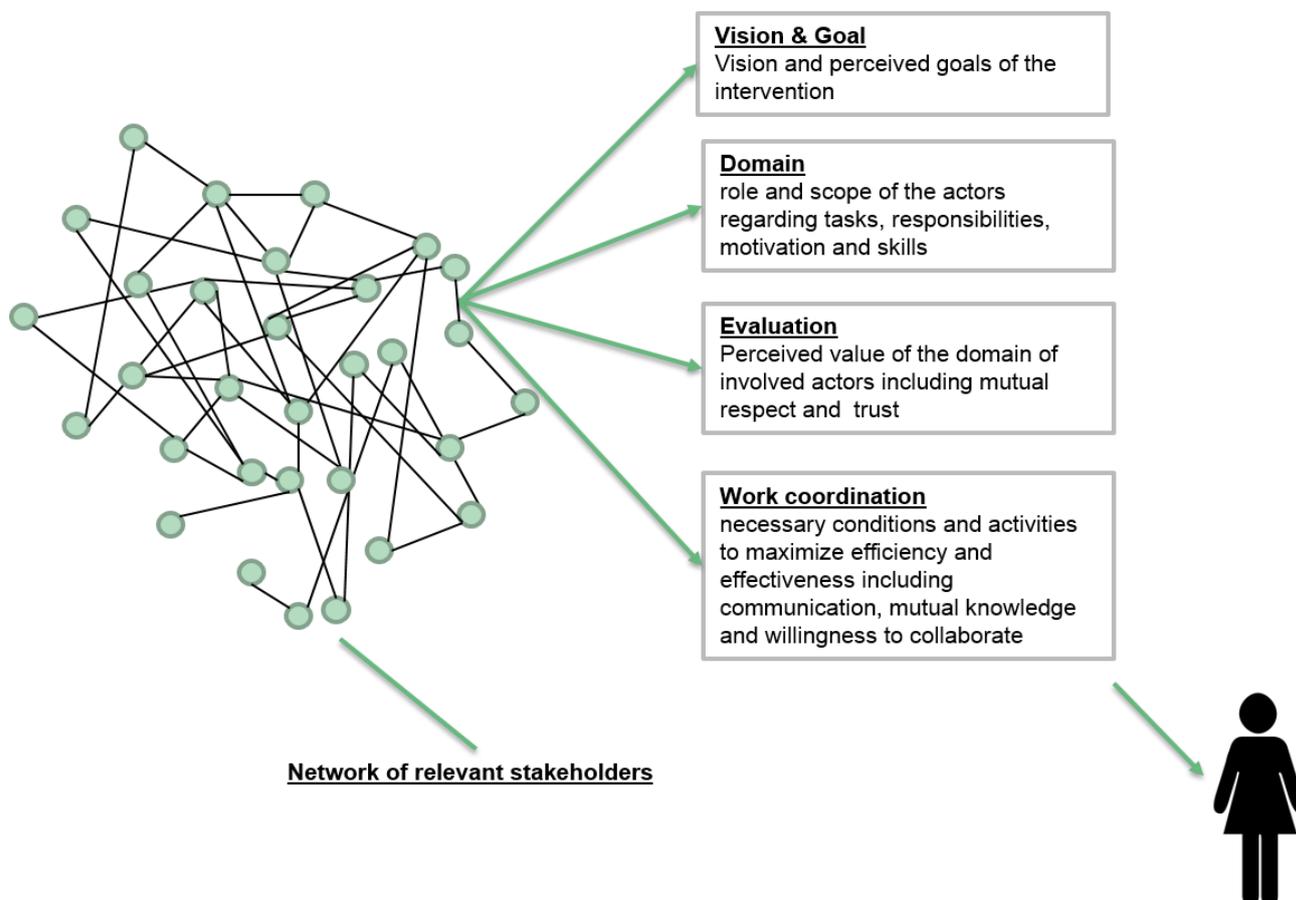


Figure 3, conceptual framework

1. **Vision and goals** in the current research will refer to the perceived goals and visions of OiA as well as the norms that lie underneath. Potential goals that have already been described by (Lecluijze, 2012) include providing low threshold parent support, reaching new target groups,



facilitating meetings between parents so that they can talk with each other and strengthening the pedagogic civil society.

2. **Domain** refers to the role and scope of the actors in the network in reaching these goals and will thus in this paper refer to the expected tasks, responsibilities, necessary skills and motivation of the volunteer and the professional in arriving at these proposed goals. For the volunteer these may for example be facilitating parent support groups or informing professionals in case of serious family issues. For the professional these may be compensating volunteers for their efforts or providing training. In addition, potential roles may be dependent on the presence of the two frames previously mentioned. The frame of access proposes tasks related to connecting professionals with parents whereas the frame of shared spaces may include roles such as being a confidential or facilitator (Ponzoni, 2015).
3. **Evaluation** refers to the respect by members of the network towards each other for the perceived value of their respective work. In the current study this will refer to evaluation of the value towards the work of not only the volunteer but also of that of the professional.
4. **Work coordination** refers to activities programmed between actors in the network to maximize efficiency and effectiveness. In the current research this refers to activities between volunteers and professionals to maximize the impact towards the parents participating in the support groups. Work coordination also includes the expected conditions set forth by volunteers and professionals in arriving at the desired goals. These conditions may be tangible such as finances or training or intangible as in enthusiasm or recognition for your work.

## 4.1 Sub-questions

According to the framework the sub-questions will be the following

1. How are the vision and goals of the intervention perceived by relevant stakeholders?
2. How is the domain of the volunteers in the intervention perceived by relevant stakeholders?
3. How is the value of the employment of volunteers in the intervention perceived by relevant stakeholders?
4. How is work coordination in the intervention perceived by relevant stakeholders?

### Network of relevant stakeholders

To add to the factors described above the other two theories used assume that the role and position of the volunteers was dependent on normative expectations and the presence of frames. To operationalize and investigate these normative expectations and the potential misalignment of these



frames the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders in the network should be included. In this study, I will thus include the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders discussed in the contextual background. These include the volunteers who lead and facilitate the parent support groups. The professionals, in this study the co-trainers, the relevant employees at the CJG and the municipality. Lastly, the parents in this study referring to individuals who have attended the support groups.





## **5 Methodology**

### **5.1 Approach**

This study aimed to gain detailed descriptions and insights into the perceptions regarding the role and position of volunteers in OiA as determined by the perspectives of the relevant stakeholders. This required in-depth and detailed data. Qualitative measures were thus most appropriate to gain data on the experiences, expectations, demands and attitudes of participants in their own words (Knafel, 1991; Verschuren, Doorewaard, & Mellion, 2010).

### **5.2 Data collection**

Data was collected through conducting semi-structured interviews and document analysis on the design, goal and training of the volunteers as well as transcripts of interviews conducted for another study with the participants of the support groups. Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate as these allow investigation of the previously defined concepts while leaving room to diverge and pursue ideas or responses in more detail. New concepts and themes not previously thought of could then be discovered (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Accordingly, the interviews were conducted with the use of a topic guide that was based on the previously described conceptual framework (Gray, 2013). The topic guide was fluid, in that when relevant topics arose it was adjusted (Gill et al., 2008; Gray, 2013). Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the CJG or at a community centre of the participant's choice. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim before analysis.

### **5.3 Participant selection and recruitment**

Participant selection for the interviews was done through selective nested sampling (Gray, 2013). This means that individuals who were relevant for OiA were asked to participate. This includes all relevant stakeholders described in the background being the certified volunteers, co-trainers and parents participating in the support groups and employees involved with organization of the intervention at CJG and the municipality. Another study was simultaneously conducted with this one and focused on the parental perspective and effectiveness of the intervention. Data collected in that study was available at municipality Rotterdam and therefore interviews with parents were not conducted in the current study. The aim was to conduct interviews until data saturation was accomplished. Contact details of the co-trainers and most of the volunteers were known at ST-RAW and were approached to participate either via email or telephone. Relevant employees at the CJG and municipality were all member of ST-RAW and could therefore be easily asked to participate in the current study.



## 5.4 Analysis

The data from the semi-structured interviews was analysed using Atlas.TI. For data analysis, a directed content analysis to find themes in the content of the transcribed interviews was used. This approach was most suitable as this study is based on theories described in studies, such as the governance network theory and the role theory. Accordingly, data analysis started with predetermined categories based on the conceptual framework to guide the initial round of categorizing. Content that could not be categorized was identified and analysed later to determine if they represent a new category or a subcategory of the existing categories. This process was done by constant comparison between cases to identify common patterns or differences across cases to establish and index analytical categories (Gray, 2013; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This process also aided in determining the norms, expectations and their influence in shaping the role and position of the volunteer.

To aid in analysis the technique of coding was used. Three types of coding were used. First, open coding was used when the first data is collected. This open coding process was guided by the operationalized concepts in the conceptual framework and the constant comparison process to identify emerging categories. After initial interviews had provided the necessary codes, axial coding was performed. This means trying to make connections between categories, assign conditions and context that helped to give rise to the category and determine the consequences of the category. Lastly, selective coding was performed to determine which codes are most important to answer the research questions (Basit, 2003; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

## 5.5 Validity and reliability

To enhance validity and reliability distinct kinds of triangulation were used. First, a member check was performed in which participants were asked to review the summary of their interview to check whether everything was interpreted correctly. Second, coding schemes were discussed with other students of the VU to determine agreement and consistency. Lastly, the use of different kinds of data also aided in enhancing the validity of the study (Johnson, 1997). External validity and reliability are less relevant as this study is focused on only OiA and results should only be useful in this particular context (Boeije, 2002; Gray, 2013). Data from the current research might give indications that may be applied in other contexts as well, but this was not the main aim.

## 5.6 Ethical considerations

According to ethical guidelines, participants of the interviews were asked for informed consent (Gray, 2013). Accordingly, participants received information about the objective and design of the study



either verbally or in writing. Anonymity and confidentiality was ensured as contact information will not be shared outside the research group and transcripts are stored anonymously as they will be given a number. Recordings of interviews were destroyed after transcriptions were made which will be stored for a maximum of 10 years on a secure server. Before participation participations were reassured that they have the right to quit their participation at any time during the study they were also be able to consult the research group for any problem, complaint or question.





## 6 Results

### 6.1 Participants

In total 14 interviews were held with individuals of three stakeholder groups. Six of the participants were volunteers, 5 were co-trainers employed by welfare organizations in Rotterdam and three were employees of the CJG. The interviews were held face-to-face either at the CJG or at a community centre. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes up to one hour. Nine documents were also identified as relevant for the study. These documents included the documents volunteers received for the training and documents containing information for acquisition and assessment of the volunteers for the cotrainers.

The volunteers who were interviewed were all actively participating in the intervention and had previously organized parent support groups. Two of the volunteers organized parenting support groups on a weekly basis for the same group of women, occasionally new women would join or exit the groups. One volunteer organized support groups for existing groups of women who would meet for other reasons, including for instance Quran reading or cooking classes. The volunteer at issue would join these groups on one or multiple occasions to organize a themed meeting around parenting. The last three volunteers organized support groups within schools for parents of the children attending these schools.

All except one of the co-trainers were actively recruiting and training volunteers in the intervention. This one trainer was not active due to illness but had prior to her illness been active in it for two years. Two of the co-trainers knew of and were in regular contact with active volunteers. The last two co-trainers were not in regular contact with any volunteers but had trained individuals in the past. Lastly, the employees of CJG interviewed included the two project leaders of the intervention and one policy advisor who was a member of the academic network ST-RAW and could thus provide valuable insights.

Analysis of these interviews and documents resulted in exploration of the four sub-concepts discussed in the framework as well as the identification of new important themes. These new themes include the experienced difficulties by all stakeholders and the perceived effects of the intervention. In the next sections I will first discuss the role of the volunteer by discussing the sub-concepts vision and goals, domain and evaluation according to the perspectives of the professionals and of the volunteers. Thereafter, I will discuss the different views on the domain of the co-trainer and the difficulties they experienced with fulfilling this domain. Namely, because this seemed to have a significant impact on the implementation of the intervention and the employment of volunteers. The last predetermined sub-concept, work coordination, will be discussed afterwards as it will describe the conditions necessary to



overcome the then discussed difficulties. Lastly, the perceived effects of the intervention will be discussed

## 6.2 Vision & goals of the intervention: a professional perspective

The first indication to the role and position of volunteers in OiA can be found in the predetermined vision and goals of the OiA intervention. As the intervention is created to provide a solution to the perceived problem that certain groups in society are not reached with the regular parental support interventions. This view was shared among all professionals interviewed. Additionally, the documents reviewed state that these parents do express a need for informal encounters with other parents and low-threshold exchanges with experts. Consequently, the most important goal expressed by all of the interviewed professionals was providing low-threshold parental support. As becomes apparent in the next quote the goal of the intervention concerns organizing conversations about parenting,

*“The goal is just to go in conversation with each other about parenting topics, not even about parenting problems but topics. That is the goal, low threshold. And that is what I understand research has shown to be very effective.” (Participant B1, co-trainer)*

Other goals were also discussed by the professionals and included expanding the social network of the participants of the intervention, being relaxed and more aware of parenting styles as well as transfer of pedagogic knowledge to the participants. Additionally, one of the co-trainers mentioned shifting the focus from negative aspects towards more positive aspects about parenting as an important goal of the intervention. The next quote illustrates this view

*“Also focus on what is positive about your child. It is way too easy to say things like, they did not get out of bed again this morning and they did not want to go to school again and they are so hyperactive and so difficult. I wish I could stuff them back where they came from. And that is true and that is annoying, but children also do a lot of good. So that they will get attention for that again” (participant B3, co-trainer)*

As illustrated in this quote the co-trainer explains that conversations about parenting can lead parents to see the positive side of parenting again, as opposed to always focusing on the negative aspects such as hyperactive and difficult children.

## 6.3 Vision & goals: motivation of the volunteers

The perceived vision and goals of the intervention as perceived by the volunteers can be found in their motivation to become a volunteer. First, the motivation of the individuals to become volunteers was



similar for all participants. They all expressed already being active in the community, with either parent support related activities or other community work. Becoming a volunteer for the intervention thus seemed to be a logical addition to their position in the community. As illustrated in the next quote a volunteer explains she was already providing some form of parenting support and doing the training was just a name for what she already did.

*“Well, it was just a label for what I already did, so why not do the training.” (Participant C2, volunteer)*

*“I already had a lot of contact with other mothers and if I would do the training I could learn more. I could practice and talk more with other people and mothers about important topics.” (Participant C5, volunteer)*

Another volunteer also explains the training was a welcome addition as she was already in a position where she was in contact with a lot of other mothers. This position was also reflected in that most volunteers expressed an eagerness to gain more theoretical knowledge in order to do even more for the community and that they found the extra expertise meetings organized at the CJG very interesting.

The goals of the intervention as perceived by the volunteers then included finding it important to organize interesting and useful meetings through creating a space where parents can exchange information and get advice from each other. Additionally, some volunteers indicated that they wanted parents to be able to get things off their chest during the support groups. Lastly, half of the volunteers mentioned that their goal for organizing the meetings was also to increase awareness about parenting styles and aid in opening participant’s eyes to what is outside of the community. This view is apparent in the quote of volunteer C5 explaining the reasons why she finds it important to be a volunteer.

*“I try to make them open their eyes, that they see the world differently and show them that their world is not so small.” (Participant C5, volunteer)*

#### **6.4 The expected domain of the volunteers: a professional perspective**

The second sub-concept included in the study was domain, which comprised the expected tasks and responsibilities and the skills and characteristics necessary to fulfil these. From a professional perspective the domain included that the volunteers are expected to organize parent support groups and thus recruit parents who will participate. In addition, most professionals agree that the volunteer should not advise and is not a pedagogue. Instead they are expected to function as a connector between parents, have a position in a specific network and possess a basic level of social skills. As described by one of the project leaders volunteers need to have their own social network so that they can organize the parent support groups somewhere.

*“They should have their own network when they begin. That they can organize it somewhere. In a mosque, a community centre or a very large friend group. You name it.” (Participant A3, CJG)*



After recruiting a group, the volunteers are expected to take an active role in leading the conversation and be able to adjust the meeting according to the needs and characteristics of the target population. To do so they are expected to be able to create a safe and open environment in which parents feel comfortable sharing experiences. This view is reflected in the following quote.

*“I think that her role is to create equivalence among the participants. She needs to try and create openness and safety.” (Participant B3, co-trainer).*

For this participant the volunteer's role concerns creating an environment where parents feel equal which she expected would lead them to share parenting experiences with each other. The necessary skills and characteristics for volunteers included being able to organize, listen, receive feedback and just generally be confident in leading such groups. Other necessary skills and characteristics include sufficient understanding of Dutch, having enough time and standing for the CJGs vision of raising children democratically. In line with this expected role and position the documents reviewed state an appropriate selection procedure including an interview to determine if they meet the minimum requirements. In addition, the training the volunteers receive is solely aimed at teaching them how to lead and facilitate conversations.

Lastly, an interesting view shared by most trainers was that although certain tasks and responsibilities are expected of the volunteer. They viewed these as only providing a basic framework which allowed it to be adapted to the individual occupying it. Individual diversity was in that sense also discussed as one of the strengths of the intervention. “This is expressed in the following quote where a co-trainer explains why she finds the intervention so valuable”.

*“That is what I find beautiful. That everyone does it in a unique way...and I think that is what I find beautiful about this project that the volunteer can keep their individuality.” (Participant B5, co-trainer)*

## **6.5 Domain: perceived and experienced role of the volunteers**

The domain as perceived and experienced by the volunteers can be summarized in two roles: an organizational role in organizing the groups and a conversation leader role in leading the groups. The organizational role included all tasks and responsibilities associated with organizing the parent support groups. For instance, inviting parents, organizing a space, providing tea and coffee and preparing the theme for that particular meeting. Half of the volunteers, those who organized groups in schools, expressed difficulties fulfilling this role as they found it time consuming and straining to find enough parents to fill the groups. For them this role was the most important aspect of being a volunteer. The



following quote from a volunteer who organized support groups in the school she works at highlights these difficulties and the disappointment she sometimes feels.

*“It is just inviting parents and making sure that coffee and tea is ready, bring people to the location of the meeting ... What I do is that I invite all these parents per mail. So really per mail, because I do not have an email address from everyone. And I also do not give it to the students, because some students do not give the letter to their parents at home. So, there is a lot of preparation. And in reality, I must say it is sometimes very disappointing. That I send 60 letters and that maybe 10 people show up, and that is what you hope right.” (Participant C6, volunteer)*

The other half of the volunteers had less difficulties as they already had a specific group to organize the support groups with or other individuals in the community fulfilled the organizational role for them. For them the conversation leader role was the most essential part of being a volunteer. This role, as expressed by all volunteers, is aimed at facilitating the conversation by initiating and guarding the discussion between parents. Guarding the discussion meant that the volunteers were responsible for keeping the discussion on topic and making sure all participants got the chance to share their experiences. The following quote summarizes the conversation leader role as described by the volunteers.

*“... your role is basically to facilitate parents in expressing their opinions to each other without it getting out of hand” (participant C1, volunteer).*

In order to fulfil these roles, the volunteers described a necessary set of skills and characteristics. These included being empathetic and thoughtful, patient, serious, a good listener, transparent and direct and able to set boundaries so that parents treat each other with respect as the next quote illustrates.

*“Very empathic, engaging, distinct, clear, transparent and yes being able to clarify your boundaries. That is very important to clarify the boundaries. Especially for yourself as well as guard the boundaries between parents” (participant C2, volunteer)*

In addition, volunteers described needing to be able to anticipate and understand the target population in order to accurately pick a theme for the support groups and initiate a discussion.

*“Always look at what people need, what the target group needs. You should not talk with someone who is illiterate about Einstein for example.” (Participant C3, volunteer)*

In the last quote the participant uses Einstein as an example to illustrate it is necessary to understand the target population when leading support groups.



## 6.6 Evaluation: the perceived value of employing volunteers, a professional perspective

The sub-concept evaluation, operationalized as the perceived value of employing volunteers in the intervention, was most apparent in the professional perspective as all shared the view that these volunteers can create a low-threshold environment that is difficult or even impossible to create for a professional. The professionals interviewed argued that these volunteers have a certain position in the target population that is different than that of professionals. First, because they are all parents themselves. Second, because professionals felt they were often associated with taking away children, keeping files or that some parents were just tired of professionals. In short, professionals felt they were not trusted by some parents. Additionally, volunteers of different ethnic backgrounds could potentially organize the support groups in their native languages. The next quote highlights the professional perspective towards evaluation.

*“The idea of course is that you are with mothers among each other, or fathers among each other. Just parents. And that is a significant difference, it may not seem so important, but it is. If a professional is leading such groups it can be very effective to convey information, but it does determine the conversation. Parents talk more easily with each other when there is no professional, because they think a professional is looking for signals of issues.” (Participant A3, CJG)*

In this quote the participant expresses she feels that the position of professionals is useful for conveying information, but not beneficial for leading parent support groups. The next quote also illustrates this view as well as highlights the perceived beneficial position that volunteers have due to their relationship with parents

*“I think that they know the group, so know these women or have a relationship with them on a certain level. So, they can already introduce themselves in a different way than I can. In this neighbourhood as a professional you are immediately put in a certain position that women no longer dare to speak openly.” (Participant B5, co-trainer)*

This position allows the volunteers to introduce the conversation in a different way than a professional can.

## 6.7 Domain: the perceived role of co-trainers

As became apparent the co-trainers play a significant role in the intervention and were thus also asked to describe their own experiences, tasks and responsibilities in the intervention. As expected, their own tasks and responsibilities included recruiting parents for the training, training them and facilitating them when they start to organize groups by themselves. This last task however was defined and interpreted differently between the trainers. This difference was based on the fact that half of the co-trainers



perceived it their responsibility that support groups were organized, whereas the other trainers perceived it the volunteer's responsibility. Co-trainers who perceived it their responsibility mostly viewed facilitating the volunteer as a kind of individual coaching. This coaching included finding some ones' strengths and employing them for the project as well as supporting them with individual issues when needed. This interpretation is apparent in the next quote where the participant explains coaching the volunteer through finding her strengths.

*"What are you good at? Some mothers can really explain a theme in one sentence, whereas other mothers will stutter and be unable to. But these can be so good at getting women to talk and make sure that they will feel comfortable. So, I should point those strengths out to them."* (Participant B3, co-trainer).

The other interpretation of their role in facilitating them, leaving the responsibility to the volunteer, is apparent in the next quote. The trainer explains it is the volunteers' responsibility support groups are organized, she interpreted her role as being there when the volunteer needed help.

*"They are responsible for organizing these groups. They can always come back when they need help or whatever. It is up to them."* (Participant B1, co-trainer)

## **6.8 Experienced difficulties for co-trainers**

Although there were differences in interpretation for the role of the co-trainers all co-trainers experienced the same difficulties fulfilling their role in the project. These difficulties were all related to recruiting and retaining the volunteers. It was unclear how many volunteers were actually trained and how many were actively organizing groups, but it was a difficulty expressed by all co-trainers. In addition, only two of the five interviewed co-trainers were in contact with volunteers who were actively organizing support groups. Most co-trainers expressed potential reasons for these difficulties which included high expectations and demands of the volunteers, the non-committal nature of volunteering and the personal issues some volunteers had. These difficulties make the project very time consuming for the co-trainers, which some perceive as an issue when it is conflicting with their other responsibilities. The next quote illustrates the difficulties with finding volunteers.

*"It is just difficult to find volunteers, because there are a considerable number of indicators that a parent needs to fulfil and also contra indicators. And what I notice now is that there are parents who want it but who are not sufficient in Dutch to do the training, or do not have enough time. Because it is volunteering but it is not without obligations. And then what I notice is that it becomes difficult to make parents enthusiastic to take part."* (Participant B1, co-trainer).

In this example the co-trainer expresses she feels parents are not enthusiastic about taking part as they do not speak Dutch well enough, do not have enough time or that the volunteering has too many obligations.



Retaining volunteers was considered problematic and caused frustration for some of the co-trainers as most expressed training many volunteers who did not actively continue with the intervention even with intensive coaching. The next quote highlights these problems as the co-trainer explains she needs to invest a considerable amount of time in keeping in contact with the volunteers, even with this investment volunteers seemed to discontinue volunteering when other things came their way.

*“They do the training and then you invest quite a lot of time. Then they have to do the 3 practice meetings and that is when some people already quit.... And sometimes other things come their way and that is why they quit, but with volunteers it is just the case that you have to invest time in, hey how are? And that just costs a lot of time.” (Participant B5, co-trainer)*

These difficulties also caused the co-trainers to disregard some of the expected skills and characteristics. For example, having a network was discussed as one of the most important characteristics by the co-trainers. But these same co-trainers do not find, not having a network a major issue for allowing them to follow the training. Instead the difficulties of finding participants for the training mostly result in anyone with motivation and fluency in Dutch being able to start the training for volunteer. The next quote highlights this view as the co-trainer explains when she will admit someone to participate in the training.

*“ In principal they should have [a network], but then I feel like I deny someone access and maybe that one would be such a good one because her motivation is so big that that network will come eventually. They just need a push in the right direction to do that and you would not want to deny someone that. Look sometimes I see a mother who really wants it, but if you do not speak the language than you cannot follow training. But if you can and you have some restrictions, why not?” (Participant B2, co-trainer).*

She disregards some of the necessary skills and characteristics as she states she does not want to deny someone access to the training. Similarly, some of the professionals also referred to the selection process described earlier more as a natural process in which people who are unfit will eventually drop out. As participant A2 (CJG) stated: *“It selects itself, a sort of natural selection”*

These difficulties also caused one trainer to doubt if this project should be supported by volunteers as she thought it might be valuable to make the volunteering a paid position. As this, according to her, can potentially increase commitment and provide more guarantees for the continuation for the project. As she said: *“to bind people, I think a paid job would be better” (participant B1, co-trainer)*



## 6.9 Work coordination: necessary conditions for successful conduction of the intervention

As difficulties were experienced by professionals and volunteers certain conditions arose that could aid and facilitate the volunteers. Most of these conditions can be summarized under the concept work coordination, in that collaboration between stakeholders was expressed to be essential for the successful conduction of the project. First, some volunteers and professionals mentioned that collaboration between volunteers could aid in lowering the workload for the volunteer. In addition, two trainers expressed that pairing volunteers in groups of two could enhance the efficiency of the project. Namely that it then was possible to pair volunteers according to their strengths. For example, one could take on the organizational role whereas the other one would take on the conversation leader role.

Other essential work coordination conditions included collaboration with existing structures. This was expressed by all trainers in that they believed collaboration with other organizations such as schools or Islamic centres could be very valuable for the project. That is that it would allow for a larger potential group of parents who would be interested in participating in parent support group and could be easily invited. For instance, collaboration between the social worker responsible for parent contact within schools with the volunteers was often named as having great potential by trainers. This is corroborated by the fact that all volunteers participating in this study organized support groups within existing structures such as schools and community centres. One of the volunteers interviewed also worked at a school and she also expressed that the intervention provided her with a good method she could use to get in contact with the parents. This becomes clear in the next quote where she explains how she can use the intervention as a method to make parents become more involved with the school of their children.

*“It is not like primary school where parents bring their children to school and have a coffee in the parent room. Here I have to give them a reason, like hey we have an interesting meeting. That is why I like OiA, we have a theme and we can talk about something. That is why I find it interesting... this is a good guideline for me.” (Participant C6, volunteer)*

In order to achieve such collaboration most professionals asserted that this would require more awareness about the project at other organizations. In addition, it would help if the project, and also the title Ouder in Actie, would gain a certain status and value and was widely acknowledged by organizations in Rotterdam. The next quote highlights this wish as the co-trainer hopes the intervention will spread throughout Rotterdam, by word of mouth, and that the status of the volunteers in the intervention would be widely acknowledged.



*“My hope is what I just said that it will spread and that at least each neighbourhood would have one OiA who has regular meetings. I would very much like that. And that from there by word of mouth it will be known like: oh you are a volunteer, I would like that too!” (Participant B4, co-trainer)*

This is also where the role of municipality comes in to the equation in that some professionals believed that having informal parental support more incorporated in municipal policies would aid in supporting the project. Regarding the role of the CJG no explicit wishes or needs were expressed by either co-trainers or volunteers as both were pleased with the coordination and collaboration with the institution. The only other condition discussed by volunteers included a wish to gain more in-depth theoretical knowledge about parenting.

## **6.10 Perceived effects of the intervention for volunteers and parents**

Perceived effects of the project can be recognized for the volunteer themselves and for the parents participating in the parent support groups. For the volunteers themselves perceived effects included the project being a stepping stone in their personal development by benefitting from following the training. Most of the interviewed professionals expected the project to have a long-lasting effect on the volunteers as they would always retain something of the training. As a co-trainer mentioned:

*“I have reached at least 30 or 40 parents. They use [what they have learned] in their lives.... In that sense it is never wasted.” (Participant B2, co-trainer)*

So even when the volunteers do not actively start organizing support groups, this co-trainer did not view it as a waste of resources as volunteers would always gain from following the training.

Most of the volunteers also expressed learning from leading the support groups. This becomes clear in the next quote where a volunteer explains that she and the parents in her support groups learn a lot from sharing experiences.

*“Sharing experiences, that is the goal. You learn a lot from those experiences. I learn a lot from it, so I am happy I am doing it.” (Participant C3, volunteer)*

Perceived effects for parents by both professionals and volunteers, included them being able to get certain issues of their chest, actually trying the advises they got from the meetings, becoming more aware of their parenting style and becoming more involved with the schools of their children. A short overview of the most significant results can be found in appendix 1.



## 7 Discussion and conclusion

The current study aimed to gain insights in the perspectives of relevant stakeholders regarding the role and position of volunteers in OiA, an early pedagogic intervention. Overall it seemed that the vision and goals of the intervention were perceived similar for most stakeholders as it comprised providing low-threshold parenting support by facilitating conversations between parents. The domain of volunteers comprised being an extension of the professionals covering for their perceived deficiencies in reaching certain groups as well as providing parenting support for these groups. Their role was also highly valued by participants in the study. All stakeholders then agree that in order to fulfil this role and position it is most important that these volunteers have a significant network, a position in this network and are competent enough to lead these groups. Active volunteers expressed becoming a volunteer mostly because of wanting to do more for the community and personally develop themselves by following the training. In sum, the expectations of the volunteers by the professionals did not seem to deviate much from the experiences of the volunteers instead interesting results concern the reasoning behind employing volunteers and the challenges and opportunities for OiA related to the role of the co-trainer and the difficulties regarding recruiting and retaining volunteers.

Although no significant discrepancies were found regarding the perceived role of the volunteers it remains interesting that the reasoning behind employing volunteers seemed to be based on the perceived deficiency of professionals. Other studies concluded similar reasoning behind engaging volunteers describing them as extenders of formal care, or paraprofessionals (Gruijter et al., 2009; van der Klein, Mak, van der Graag, & medewerking van Majone Steketee, 2011). This reasoning is also found in the frame of access discussed in earlier parts of this report where volunteers form a bridge between hard-to-reach (migrant) target groups and institutionalized aid. In this role volunteers would align the supply and demand of youth care by bringing issues and challenges to the attention of professionals (Ponzoni, 2015; van der Klein et al., 2011) . This is interesting as although the same reasoning is present in OiA the volunteers in this study did not seem to serve as a bridge but rather as a facilitator for exchanges and conversations between parents. Their added value seemed to be more in providing an open and safe space in which parents could easily share experiences with each other which is more consistent with the shared spaces frame (Ponzoni, 2015). In short, OiA seems to incorporate aspects of both frames in determining the role and position of these volunteers without necessarily resulting in frame misalignment.

As mentioned, one of the challenges and opportunities in this study was related to the role of the cotrainer and the different interpretations they had regarding coordination of the volunteers. As was already determined by other studies ineffective coordination of volunteers may lead to ineffective



performance of an intervention (Yanay & Yanay, 2008). This also seemed to be the case for OiA as the limited coordination of volunteers by some of the co-trainers may have played a role in the experienced difficulties retaining volunteers in OiA. For example, lack of contact and coordination may result in volunteers feeling like they are not needed or not competent enough to be an active volunteer causing them to drop out (Yanay & Yanay, 2008). This is corroborated by other studies that conclude the role of the professional in employing and retaining volunteers is essential and should always include regular informal contact (Linders et al., 2016; Ponzoni, 2012). Limited coordination by co-trainers may be a result of the transformations in the social domain as research has indicated they may not see coordination of volunteers as a significant part of their job yet (Linders et al., 2016; Redeker, Nanniga, & van Steekelenburg, 2017). Lastly, for OiA it does not seem explicitly clear yet who is accountable for the accurate conduction of the intervention, the professional or the volunteer, which could have resulted in the different interpretation co-trainers had regarding their role (van Bochove, Tonkens, & Verplanke, 2014).

Other challenges and opportunities related to the difficulty retaining volunteers can be found in the perceived non-committal nature of volunteering, the lack of adequate selection and the motivation of the volunteers. The first can be considered an important reason for dropping out, as co-trainers experienced volunteers dropping out due to personal everyday reasons. This is similar to other studies that concluded volunteer drop out reflected the routine nature of every day practices and commitments (Claxton-Oldfield & Claxton-Oldfield, 2012; Hustinx, 2010). In addition, the selection procedure was often not followed and may have resulted in volunteer drop out as individuals lacked the right competences. This similar to other studies that have shown volunteers who feel too much is asked of them will leave their volunteering position as they experience role overload (Goode, 1960; Suidman, 2016). Moreover, not following the selection guidelines may result in decreased effects for the parents and an overall lower quality of the support groups. Lastly, volunteer drop out may reflect a mismatch in motivation as these individuals may not have the right motivation for continuing volunteering after the training only wanting to personally develop themselves. As previous research has already stated it is essential for organizations recruiting volunteers to match their tasks with their competences and motivation preventing motivational saturation after completing the training (van der Klein et al., 2011; Yanay & Yanay, 2008).

As I have briefly discussed the results within the context of the intervention, we can also view them within the bigger framework of national transformation in Dutch youth care. This study then indicates that role confusion for social professionals is still present in the pedagogic sector and that coordination of volunteers is not always viewed as a clear task of these professionals (Suidman, 2016). In addition, fragmentation in the pedagogic service delivery seems to be present as conditions set forth by professionals all refer to increased coordination with other organizations and structures.



This is unfortunate as the active volunteers all coordinated and collaborated with schools or community centres also indicating this to be an essential condition for employing informal actors in parent support. This study would then suggest increasing the awareness of the intervention and the perceived value of volunteers in pedagogic interventions with other organizations and institutions providing pedagogic services would aid in successful continuation. Regarding irreconcilable vision and goals, OiA has showed progress as the goal of the intervention was perceived similar by all stakeholders as opposed to other studies (Linders et al., 2016; Ponzoni, 2012; van Bochove et al., 2013). Lastly, OiA does seem to be able to increase the problem-solving ability of the participants and strengthen informal support networks as well as empower parents and recognize the value of volunteers in pedagogic services. Such interventions could thus prove valuable in transforming youth care provided that other aspects of the pedagogic service system properly collaborate and coordinate their services.

## **7.1 Strengths & limitations**

Results of the current study should be interpreted with caution as it was not without flaws. First, this study due to time constraints did not include the perspectives of inactive volunteers. This is unfortunate as they could have provided valuable insights regarding the reasons they had dropped out. Future studies should therefore focus on including this perspective as well. Social desirability should also be considered as a source of possible bias, as one of the participants indicated feeling hesitant to open up to the municipality fearing that it may have profound consequences for the intervention or her job. Similar hesitation may have been present with other participants as well, resulting in social desirable answers. Lastly, no exact numbers on how many volunteers were trained and how many were still active were obtained. Future evaluation studies should aim to include such data as well as it can be indicative of the effectiveness of interventions employing volunteers. Strong aspects of the current study included the inclusion of several perspectives which aided in providing a comprehensive overview of the intervention. It also seemed that data saturation was accomplished in the current study as no new themes emerged after the last few interviews. Lastly, various forms of triangulation were used which aided in validity and reliability of the current study (Johnson, 1997).

## **7.2 Conclusion**

To summarize and answer the main research question I can conclude that the role and position of volunteers in OiA as perceived by relevant stakeholders is a result of the solution for the perceived deficiency of professionals working in youth care. The goal of the intervention is thus to ensure parenting support in the form of volunteer-led support groups for hard-to-reach groups. Results showed that the employment of these volunteers was well appreciated by all stakeholders and no discrepancies were found regarding the expected goal and domain of the effort of volunteers. Challenges that remain



to be overcome include role confusion for professionals, coordination and collaboration with other organizations in the pedagogic field as well as effective recruiting and retaining of volunteers.



## 8 Recommendations

In order to overcome the challenges discussed earlier the following suggestions should be considered. Regarding recruiting and retaining volunteers, it would be helpful if the role for the cotrainers was better described giving them a clearer description of the tasks and responsibilities associated with coordinating and facilitating the volunteer. In line with previous research these tasks and responsibilities (van Bochove et al., 2014) should include the following:

- Regular (informal) meetings so that the volunteer will feel part of the team. Weekly, biweekly or monthly meetings should be considered.
- Besides regular meetings also make sure the volunteer feels needed and missed by giving them regular attention through for example text messages, phone calls and general interest in their lives.
- Accurately follow the selection procedure that already accurately describes the profile of a successful volunteer. Specific attention should be paid to the motivation of the volunteers to check if they not just want to do the training to personally develop themselves and the size of the volunteers social network. Additional (6 month) performance evaluations should be installed to check how the volunteers' motivation develops and what needs and wishes they might have. This will help the co-trainer in facilitating and coordinating the volunteer.
- As some volunteers found it difficult to find participants for the groups co-trainers should actively support them by using their own network of parents and professionals to find potential participants. This will ultimately aid in establishing collaboration and coordination with other organizations as well.
- Co-trainers should have sufficient time to fulfil their role for OiA by having it explicitly incorporated in their job description. This will help in acquiring the right resources such as time and money to spend on coordinating volunteers.
- The co-trainer should be responsible and accountable for the execution of the support groups, as the current study suggest leaving this to the volunteer is not effective.

Additionally, effectiveness of the intervention can be increased by more explicitly employing the bridge function of the volunteers. Namely as it can aid in the timely detection of more serious youth and family issues so that accurate professional care can be provided (Gruijter et al., 2009). This could thus be more explicitly incorporated as a task for the volunteers.

This study also suggests that increased collaboration and coordination with other welfare organizations, such as schools and community centres, in Rotterdam would aid in effectively conducting the intervention. The idea behind this is that these organizations potentially have groups of



parents who are interested in participating in the support groups and can then ask one of the volunteers to organize these. The first step in increasing collaboration and coordination is by making other organizations in Rotterdam aware of the intervention and the value of the volunteers, which should be considered a task of the CJG. Additionally, the review of (San Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2005) states conditions for successful collaboration between professionals including willingness to collaborate, trust in each other, mutual respect and communication. From the current study I cannot make any conclusions as to the realization of these conditions and these should thus be further investigated. A last recommendation concerns accurately detailing and reporting which volunteers were trained and who remained active, as this will aid in giving and keeping a clear overview of the intervention.



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## Appendix 1: overview of most important results

The green shaded sub-concepts represent no significant discrepancies were found between the different perspectives or results were beneficial for the intervention. The orange shaded subconcepts represent where results indicate challenges and opportunities for the intervention.

Sub-concept/emergent theme	Professional perspective CJG & co-trainers	Volunteer perspective		
Vision & goals	Low-threshold parental support, expanding social network, awareness of parenting styles, transfer of pedagogic knowledge	<i>The goal is just to go in conversation with each other about parenting topics</i>	Logical addition to their position, creation of a space where parents can exchange information, awareness of parenting styles	<i>I try to make them open their eyes, that they see the world differently and show them that their world is not so small</i>
Domain: volunteers	Organize support groups, creating a safe and open environment, a network, individual diversity	<i>I think that her role is to create equivalence among the participants. She needs to try and create openness and safety</i>	Organize support groups, perceived as difficult facilitate conversations.	<i>your role is basically to facilitate parents in expressing their opinions to each other without it getting out of hand</i>
Evaluation	Position volunteer suitable for leading support groups, position professional not beneficial	<i>Parents talk more easily with each other when there is no professional, because they think a professional is looking for signals of issues</i>	-	



<b>Domain: co-trainers</b>	Two interpretations: individual	Individual coaching: <i>I should point</i>	-
	coaching and facilitation	<p><i>those strengths out to them</i></p> <p><i>Facilitation: They are responsible for organizing these groups</i></p>	
<b>Experienced difficulties</b>	<p>Difficult finding and retaining volunteers.</p> <p>Disregard selection procedure</p>	<p><i>..it becomes difficult to make parents enthusiastic to take part</i></p> <p><i>It selects itself, a sort of natural selection</i></p>	-
<b>Work coordination</b>	<p>Necessary conditions: increased collaboration with existing structures. Pairing volunteers. Increased awareness of intervention. Increase perceived value of the volunteers.</p>	<p><i>My hope is that it will spread and that at least each neighbourhood would have one OiA who has regular meetings. I would very much like that. And that from there by word of mouth it will be known like: oh you are a volunteer, I would like that too!</i></p>	<p>Necessary conditions: more collaboration with existing structures and other volunteers. More in-depth theoretical pedagogic knowledge</p> <p><i>Here at school I am happy that I got to know A, because she was really active in the school and now we work together which goes very well. If I want to organize something I can go to them and ask if they want to organize it together.</i></p>



<b>Perceived effects for volunteers</b>	Stepping stone for development, long-lasting effects from following training	<i>I have reached at least 30 or 40 parents. They use [what they have learned] in their lives....</i>	Learning from experiences shared in support groups	<i>You learn a lot from those experiences. I learn a lot from it</i>
		<i>In that sense it is never wasted</i>		
<b>Perceived effects for parents</b>	Get things of their chest, trying new advises, awareness parenting styles, increased involvement schools, increased social network	<i>I remember when a group of Somali women that they had talked about their fears in the group and that they had never done that before. Now that they did, they did not want to stop talking with each other.</i>	Get things of their chest, trying new advises, awareness parenting styles, increased involvement schools	<i>What I really like is when parents come back and they tell you they tried the advice they got from the group and that it worked</i>