



Sport as a playground for integration

Information for municipalities and community sports coaches
on collaboration between Asylum seekers' centres (COA) and
sports clubs



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An opportunity for municipalities

Although the inhabitants of an asylum seekers' centre in the Netherlands do not officially belong to the municipality's population, many local authorities nevertheless encourage asylum seekers to make optimal use of the facilities offered by the municipality. On the one hand because of a sense of social responsibility, and on the other hand because housing a reception centre also offers advantages for the municipality, such as creating employment within the municipality, and allowing shrinking municipalities to retain quality of life and a number of facilities.

The Sports department of the Municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch organises sports activities for the inhabitants of the reception centre in the nearby city of Rosmalen. In addition, twelve inhabitants are following the City Trainer course. Once they have completed this course, they will be able to - independently or under guidance - act as a trainer for other inhabitants of the reception centre or in a local sports association. The benefits are twofold: on the one hand the refugees have a meaningful daytime activity and increase their competences and confidence, and on the other hand there are more trainers at the reception centre and sports associations who can organise sports activities.

Sports and physical activities

By offering refugees sports and physical activities, municipalities contribute to meaningful daytime activities for refugees, with the objective of promoting integration, increasing the support base for refugees within the municipality, preventing incidents and promoting autonomy. Boredom and

having nothing to do all day make it difficult for occupants of reception centres to deal with trauma and their longing for their families and homes. Sports and physical activity offer a way to get rid of their problems and frustration and contribute to a healthy, active, sustainable, socially involved and safe society.

Integration at the sports club

A quick scan performed by the Knowledge Centre for Sport (Kenniscentrum Sport) shows that most sports activities currently take place at the reception centres. Many reception centres have playgrounds, small squares and grassy areas that can be used for low-threshold sports activities. Reception centres often also have fitness areas (some quite small) and a few centres have a gym (usually also rather small). In addition to sports activities at the reception centre, refugees greatly benefit from actively engaging with the outside world, where integration really takes



place: i.e. within the municipality, at the sports club. This is where refugees make contact with Dutch people, learn to speak Dutch and become familiar with the culture (formal and informal rules and habits) within sports clubs. This provides them with vital competences for their future in the new country. It also lowers the threshold for joining a sports club or other sports activities once they leave the centre and settle in a new municipality.

Role of the community sports coach

The municipality can appoint a community sports coach to work with an asylum seekers' centre in guiding refugees to local sports facilities. An even better approach would be for the reception centre and the municipality to jointly appoint a community sports coach for this target group. Community sports coaches have access to clubs and links with schools, and the health and wellbeing sector. They know the local 'social map' and they understand how the municipality works. Their knowledge and contacts open doors for reception centres and refugees. Community sports coaches often know which sports organisations are enthusiastic and eager to make a social contribution.

Establish contacts at the local reception centre

A good start is to invite community sports coaches to visit a reception centre. At the reception locations, sports and physical activities are part of the activation and integration policy. Per location a set budget and time is assigned for sports and physical activities. Some locations have a designated sports officer, at other locations the sports policy is implemented by activation officers, housing officers and/or volunteers. For a community sports coach, it is important to come into contact with the right employee at the centre. In practice, this is not always easy. If it is not immediately clear who is responsible for sports and physical activities at the centre, please contact the location manager.

Fulfil requirements and needs

Try to get a good idea of the requirements and needs of the centre and the occupants. Find out about the sports policy, available hours and the support base within the reception centre. What activities are organised already, and for which target groups? What works and what doesn't? Try to find out whether the needs of the inhabitants have been



assessed, and what the results of this assessment were. By talking to occupants, listening to them and really making contact, you will obtain a better idea of their backgrounds and needs. The wishes of the asylum seekers tend to centre on football, fitness, volleyball, basketball and swimming. Women often mention dance activities and Zumba. Biking and lessons are also frequently organised and are very useful as a means of transport to other sports activities. However, the choice for certain activities clearly depends on what is available in the vicinity of the centre.

Municipal contribution

In addition to bridging the gap between the reception centre and sports providers around the reception centre, the community sports coach can also stimulate sports activities for asylum seekers in other ways, such as

- ➔ Providing sports facilities for activities for asylum seekers
- ➔ Offering sports and other staff training to the target group, for instance sports and physical activities coach
- ➔ Inviting refugees to take part in municipal sports activities such as inaugurations, tournaments, sports events, either as fan, as an athlete or as a volunteer

- ➔ Informing employees of the reception centre of discount schemes for membership of sports associations
- ➔ Collecting sports clothing and equipment for reception centres and their occupants
- ➔ Organising transport to sports activities

Volunteer work

Many sports associations face a shortage of volunteers. At the same time, asylum seekers and refugees at the reception centres of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) spend a lot of time just waiting. Two problems that can be solved at once and in which the municipality can play an important role. Please read the brochure entitled "[Handbook on Volunteering of Migrants in Sport Clubs and Organisations](#)" with tips and focus points for successful volunteering of refugees in your municipality and in sport clubs.

This series also includes the following:

- Information for asylum seekers' centres on collaboration with sports clubs
- Information for sport clubs on collaboration with asylum seekers' centres



"A few years ago, I got a call from a volunteer at a reception centre, asking me whether one of the refugees could come and play volleyball in my team. He kind of became my assistant, and helped me to train the children. It went so well that he was given his own group to train. Then one day someone asked him: "Hey, Hamid, do you also have a job?" "No," said Hamid. "Well," this man said, "I have a car dismantling business, and I could use some help." So now Hamid works there. I think this is such a great example of sports as an integrating tool. Hamid has a hobby, he trains children, and he has a job!"

Quote by volleyball trainer

"The Dutch sports associations' culture is quite unique. What I find important is that refugees are introduced to this culture, so that when they move on to living independently, it's not all new to them, and so that children in their new municipality find it easier to join an association because they and their parents are already familiar with how things are done. I think collaboration between the reception centres and the sports providers in their neighborhoods makes this step easier for them."

Quote by COA employee



Tip!

At www.allesoversport.nl all knowledge about sport and movement comes together.

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