



Restorative Justice Café, 11 December 2024 – Utrecht The Netherlands

The city of Utrecht embraces both human rights and restorative justice. What it means to be a restorative city is discussed during Restorative Cafés four times per year. Key note speakers, inhabitants of Utrecht and professionals talk about topics of interest, such as culture, schools and decolonization, with a focus on what is needed to further develop restorative practices in Utrecht. On Wednesday 11 December 2024, Annemieke Wolthuis (RJN, Dutch partner i-RESTORE2.0) organized together with mediator and EFT expert Makiri Mual, Restorative Café # 5 on the theme “Restorative Justice and youth” as a final event of the i-RESTORE2.0 project.

Participants

The Restorative Café #5 was attended by 22 participants including citizens of Utrecht. Among the represented organisations were Young Perspectives (YOPE), the Child Protection Board, universities, education, prisons, law firms, youth care/probation and the municipality.

Programme

9.15	Arrival
9.30-9.40	Makiri Mual Welcome & opening
9.40-10.00	Annemieke Wolthuis (RJN) – Introduction theme and project
10.00 -11.00	Nourelhouda Belqadi (CAB-member) - i-RESTORE2.0 outcomes and results
11.10 – 11.15	Break
11.15 – 12.15	Julia von Graevenitz - Documentary Een schone lei and discussion
12.15 – 12.30	Closing round by Makiri and Annemieke

Opening & introduction

The group was welcomed by Makiri Mual and the question what restorative justice means in short for the participants. To have an open question like that with honest answers from the group created immediately a feeling of connectedness.

Project coordinator Annemieke Wolthuis addressed the main aims and outcome of the i-RESTORE2.0 project. The 2-year EC funded project deals with Accessible Quality Restorative Justice processes for children in contact with the law in Europe. It was done with 4 county partners in Greece, Estonia, Romania and the Netherlands added by expertise from the European Forum for Restorative Justice and Terre des hommes office in Budapest. She shared aspects from the twinning with Greece, the trainings that were set up and given, circles in schools and with teachers that have been done and the policy work which resulted in a closer cooperation in the youth justice field among professionals. A unique part of the work was that youngsters were involved from the beginning. That is why Annemieke invited Houda to share something about the work they did and what that meant to her.

Presentation by Nourelhouda Belqadi - Child Advisory Board member (CAB) i-RESTORE2.0

Child Advisory Board (CAB) member [Nourelhouda Belqadi](#) (Houda) presents the outcomes of i-RESTORE2.0, her experiences as a CAB member, the CAB's learning journey and the results of their work.



For Houda, who was still a teenager in secondary school at the start of the project, it was a great opportunity to participate in the project, sharing views and learning about justice and restorative approaches. As CAB members (group of 8 active members age 16-20) they discussed how justice policies have an effect on children's rights, how the voices of children can be better heard and how to make restorative justice processes accessible for children and young people adapting them to their needs. Houda shared her personal experience on how she became more aware on what justice means related to the importance of rebuilding trust and repairing harm. As she says, *'justice is not just about punishment, but it is a chance for dialogue, giving children a chance to be heard and understood, and ultimately: healing'*. During her presentation Houda was sharing photos and a video of the CAB team while they were campaigning and raising awareness about restorative justice, its benefits and the importance of RJ in children's justice systems.

At the end Houda concludes that CAB membership has been a great opportunity for her to give children and young people a voice. Being a pedagogic student at university now, she tells us she is inspired to continue her restorative journey advocating for youth participation and restorative justice. She also shared her experiences on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nourelhouda-belqadi_restorativejustice-rjn-herstelrecht-activity-7272912884777537538-HonD?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_ios



Jolan Van den Broeck who coordinated the CAB during the project confirmed the good work done by the youth team and stressed also the importance of restorative city work, which is a development in several cities and communities around the world. See: <https://www.euforumrj.org/restorative-cities>

Documentary and discussion - Julia von Graevenitz

After the break, documentary maker and author Julia von Graevenitz presents her new book, “Ik zit vast” (I'm stuck). Accompanying the book, she shows the just released the documentary named 'Een schone lei' (A clean slate). Book and documentary tell the stories of the troublesome journey of young adolescents who are just released from (youth) prison going back to society. It connects well to the presentation of Houda visualising her experiences and recommendations in practise. As Julia is following the reintegration process of several young people, it becomes clear that it is key for them to have someone to trust, to be able to speak out, to discuss difficult situations and to get opportunities and new chances.

The documentary (45 min) shows youngster Mo, from his first day of freedom after being imprisoned for years for committing an explosive robbery. Mo is trying hard to follow “the right path”. We see him getting stuck in his efforts to find a place to stay, to study and work, also struggling to stay in touch with his family and friends. Mo is intensively guided by the municipality to get his life on track. But crime also continues to attract. As the documentary continues, it is very unsure whether he can make it until the end. The story of Mo confronts participants with the system being of help and being an obstacle at the same time. We discuss about how to connect with young people, giving opportunities to reintegrate, but also to take responsibility trying to restore what went wrong before. We continue talking about the role of family, parents and how childhood trauma often is present during reintegration. At least one person in the lives of these youngsters who is always there in good times or bad times can make the difference for a young person to stay out of a live with criminal behaviour. In the movie that is Pedro, a social worker in Utrecht with a more long-term commitment and also ready to act during the middle of the night. We need more Pedro's is what was concluded.

The documentary will be used in education and in youth justice institutions to discuss the risks and temptations of young people with young people. And to highlight the importance of prevention and aftercare. For more info about the book and the movie and how to order a book or presentation, see: <https://studionoodzaak.nl/product/ikzitvast/> Restorative knowledge and work will also be included in these talks.

Finalizing and wrapping up, we conclude that today we raised awareness on the importance of restorative justice for adolescents during and after being in prison, to really see the youngsters and to give them the support they need to pick up their lives and follow a different path with often goes with ups and downs. And that there is a need to keep the work done in i-RESTORE2.0 alive and active.



Houda (CAB) on social media (Linkedin): This experience has opened my eyes to the importance of advocacy. I've learned that children's involvement in these processes leads to better outcomes, not only for them but also for their communities. Seeing the potential for dialogue to mend relationships and reduce trauma has been incredibly inspiring. I've also realized the importance of young voices in justice systems.

Restorative justice isn't just a concept—it's a practice that creates space for everyone to heal. Being part of this project has given me hope for a better, more understanding justice system.

EFRJ on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/efrj_restorative-caf%C3%A9-utrecht-is-organised-activity-7206314328789045248-nQUg?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Houda: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nourelhouda-belqadi_restorativejustice-rjn-herstelrecht-activity-7272912884777537538-HonD?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nourelhouda-belqadi_restorative-justice-week-2024-when-i-joined-activity-7264301972684423169-tfSQ?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Text: Maartje Berger and Annemieke Wolthuis, Restorative Justice Nederland, December 2024