



Policy Plan (Beleidsplan)

2021 - 2022



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Who Are We?

Ark is a not-for-profit, *children's daycare and expertise centre* established in Amsterdam in 2011. We provide specialised care and guidance for children aged 3 - 13 years with autism and additional complex developmental disorders. Our focus is especially on children who, because of their challenges, are exempt from the school system and require constant one-to-one care and supervision.

As well as requiring specialised care, a child exempt from school will have limited opportunities to interact with peers and with the wider community. Learning with others, growing together, and negotiating relationships with peers are all crucial components of every child's development; as is learning to interact with the physical and social world around them. For children with autism, social communication and interaction lie at the core of their challenges. Limited access to group learning, play, and other social activities can exacerbate these challenges and restrict a child's potential for development, independence, and meaningful inclusion in society.

Ark provides the constant one-to-one support these children need; but we do this in the context of a dynamic small group setting. We offer a child-focused learning environment with individualised development plans. At the heart of our programme are supported peer-to-peer and community activities designed to develop the children's independence, and at the same time raise awareness in the wider community and improve responses to all children with special needs – *helping all of us to reach our full potential.*

Our Mission Statement

***"All children have within them the potential to be great kids.
It's our job to create a great world where this potential can flourish."***

Stanley Greenspan, M.D. (*'Great Kids'*, 2007)

Our Objectives

Ark's objectives are to:

- Support children with autism and additional complex developmental challenges to develop their communication skills and social competence, in order to become more independent and included members of society.
- Improve the lives of families with children with special needs.
- Improve the responses of professionals and wider society to children with special needs.



Our Client Group

Our clients are children exempt from school with significant developmental delays, usually with disorders of communicating, interacting, and relating (such as Autism, Sensory Processing Disorder, communication & language delays).

Ark operates a *Total Communication Policy*: as well as Dutch and English, we try to accommodate any other preferred language. As a result, we work with a high proportion of children and families whose first language is not Dutch, and who are thereby at further risk of isolation and marginalisation. For this reason, our main external communication language is English.

We also work with non-verbal children using signing and a range of other augmentative communication systems such as visual timetables, electronic talkers, and picture exchange systems.

The following criteria apply when considering a child's admission to Ark:

- The number of children on site per day should not exceed 10.
- We will not be able to offer a place if doing so is likely to have a significant negative impact on other children at Ark.

Ark is not able to offer a place to a child in any of the following circumstances:

The child is:

- younger than 3, or older than 13 years.

The child has:

- a medical condition (such as severe epilepsy) that requires medical or nursing care.
- a serious psychiatric disorder (such as psychosis, personality disorders, severe depression etc.).
- physical challenges or disabilities that could compromise health & safety guidelines.

Ark personnel are not permitted to administer any prescription medicines to children.



Approach & Philosophy

Traditional approaches often focus on managing behaviour and teaching standard, testable skills. Ark's model is child-focused, based on the *Developmental, Individual differences, Relationship-based (DIR) Intervention Model* [Greenspan & Wieder, 1998]. DIR is widely known as "DIR/Floortime".

We believe every child has unique strengths to be developed and challenges to overcome and that every child should be valued and celebrated. We set SMART goals appropriate to each child's unique sensory and developmental profile. Progress occurs through meaningful, experience-based interactions with educators, with other children, and with the wider community. We believe that such relationship-based experiences are the building blocks for all learning and that these experiences help children to:

- Sustain attention to activities & interactions.
- Understand & express a range of emotions.
- Understand & negotiate the world around them.
- Develop adaptive & coping strategies.
- Develop a strong sense of self.
- Use creativity & imagination, think logically, and solve problems

Collaboration

Ark believes in a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach. Parents, other family members and carers, as well as other therapists, specialists, and professionals working with the child are all part of the child's team. Collaboration among this team is central to our model.

Individual Development Plans are developed in collaboration with the whole team and consent is sought from parents or legal guardians for each new goal plan. We provide daily reports of each child's responses to the day's activities. Evaluation and progress reports are made twice a year. Goals and strategies are continually evaluated and revised in collaboration with the team.



Officers & Other Personnel

Board of Directors

Chair - Jill Adler

Secretary - Marieke van Dam

Treasurer - Mark de Jonge

Management Team

Head of Care - Paulla Keen

Head of Programmes - Kevin Walton

Head of Finance and Administration - Sander van Leeuwen

Educators & Associated Professionals

Ark works with a creative group of dedicated, talented, and experienced freelance educators and therapists who provide services during Ark's 42-week operating schedule. They include remedial teachers (orthopedagoog), psychologists, support workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, sensory processing therapists, speech & language therapists, movement therapists, art therapists, music therapists. All are chosen for their skills and experience and their commitment to our methods, philosophy, and vision.

Location & Programme Hours

Ark's registered and visiting address is Sloterveerlaan 1 - C101, 1064GX Amsterdam, Netherlands. The organisation currently works directly with children from 9:00 to 15:00, Monday to Friday, 42 weeks per year. We also provide additional 'after-school' and holiday care outside these times.

Income Streams

Ark receives income from fees paid indirectly by clients, and from private and corporate donations.

Ark's clients are nominally the children enrolled for its services. However, since all Ark's clients are below the age of consent, parents or legal guardians of the child will act on the child's behalf. Clients will be in receipt of funding from municipalities (gemeentes) in the form of a personal budget (Persoonsgebondenbudget (PGB)). Ark charges fees at standard rates set by municipalities and these fees are paid to Ark via the Social Insurance Bank (Sociale Verzekeringsbank). Ark charges no fees directly to clients.



Asset Management

PGB fees are used by Ark to pay the fees of the professional educators who work directly with the children. These fees also cover other day to day running costs of the centre, and the administration and management of clients' development and care plans.

Other costs, such as fees for specialist therapists, special activities, resources, or equipment, are not covered by PGBs. Ark funds these costs through donations to the Stichting.

Any profit is returned to the Stichting to improve and enrich the services we offer children and their families, and to safeguard the long-term sustainability of the Stichting and its objectives. Such funds are kept in a separate savings account with the ING Bank. For further details of spending plans on activities and projects for 2021 and 2022, see below "Additional Projects for 2021 - 2022).

Remuneration Policy

Ark does not pay any bonuses or dividends to personnel or office holders. Statutory duties and activities of Board members are not remunerated beyond reasonable expenses incurred in carrying out these activities. All other personnel at Ark are freelancers and receive fees set at standard reasonable rates according to their experience, qualifications and the nature of the services they provide.

Other Policies & Protocols

The following policies and protocols are in operation at Ark. These are reviewed regularly and are available to view on request.

- Health & Safety Policy
- Coronavirus Policy & Protocols
- Fire Policy
- Food Safety Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Guidance for Managing Challenging Behaviour
- Intimate Care Policy & Guidance
- Child Protection & Domestic Violence Policy & Reporting Protocol
- Privacy & Data Protection Policy and Statement

Activities & Projects

Ark addresses its objectives by:

- Maintaining & equipping suitable premises to accommodate a specialised Daycare and Expertise Centre for children with autism and additional complex challenges.
- Providing a playful, child-focused learning environment, with one-to-one supervision from trained professional educators and therapists.
- Providing appropriate personnel, equipment, and resources to run a daily programme of individual and small group activities (Mon. - Fri. 09:00 - 15:00) to develop children's communication, language, social skills, daily life skills and independence.
- Implementing *Individual Development Plans* to support the development of each child's cognitive, motor, social communication, and independence skills.
- Providing appropriate space, equipment, and opportunities for children to receive a range of on-site specialist professional therapies (speech & language therapy, occupational & physiotherapy, movement therapy, sensory integration therapy, art therapy, music therapy).
- Providing opportunities for children to interact and form relationships with their peers.
- Providing opportunities for children to interact with the wider community through visits to shops, museums, libraries, parks, theatres, galleries and other public spaces and amenities (including public transport).
- Providing outreach, family support & advice services (including a range of after-school and holiday care services).
- Monitoring, evaluating, and improving the content and delivery of our programmes with reference to latest research and good practice guidelines.
- Creating relationships with schools, local governments, special educational needs liaison services (samenwerkingsverbanden) etc. to find appropriate placements and support for children when they become ready to attend a more mainstream educational environment.
- Providing training, knowledge-sharing and other learning opportunities for parents, other family members, educators, therapists, and other professionals.
- Increasing the awareness, knowledge, and skills of those who come into contact with children with special needs (including workshops for schools and other community organisations, and through our daily engagement with the wider community in Sloterveer, Amsterdam and beyond).

Amended Activities during Coronavirus Restrictions (2020)

2020 was a challenging year for everyone. In line with government regulations, Ark closed its doors for children and staff on the 12th March 2020; parents were asked to care for their children at home. However, since our clients are vulnerable children requiring intensive support, we (along with other care organisations) received clear indications from government, RIVM, GGD, municipalities and other contract partners that the care and services we provide should continue, albeit in altered forms that balance the emergency needs of our clients and families with the need to protect public health.

In consultation with the RIVM and GGD, one week after closing, we put in place the following arrangements for continuity of care. These were designed to minimise the risks of contagion, while as far as possible maintaining consistency of care for our clients and their families:

1. For parents who could manage the situation reasonably well themselves at home:

- We prepared and delivered resources and activities for parents to work with their child at home.
- Provided video feedback advice and support sessions.
- Where possible, we set up regular face-to-face video sessions between educators, specialists and children. If needed Ark provided an educator at home to help a child focus on a video session with a specialist.

2. For clients whose challenges meant parents needed more support at home.

- Each child had a small team of visiting educators, limited to a maximum of 2 per household and supervised by each child's Keyworker.
- Educators worked with the child at home on goals to maintain the child's development and sensory regulation.
- RIVM guidelines for hygiene and social distancing were observed at all times.
- Daily checks were made to ensure that visiting educators and all members of the household being visited were free of any symptoms.

3. For clients whose challenges meant continuing to stay home was not sustainable:

Where continued isolation at home proved too challenging, the situation could be at best, detrimental to the child's development, and at worst, potentially damaging or unsafe. On advice from RIVM and GGD, for these clients:

- Ark's premises re-opened to provide care for limited numbers of children.
- Numbers in each space were restricted to a maximum of 2 children and 2 educators with one supervisor on site in case of accident or emergency.
- RIVM guidelines on hygiene and social distancing observed.



Over the year, as government restrictions gradually relaxed, we could increase the amount of care provided on site. Initially children returned in half-sized groups for half the week, so that all children could receive some care at Ark in addition to the homecare. By mid september 2020 We were able to return to full time provision and full capacity (4 children per group) while still retaining RIVM distancing and hygiene protocols.

Additional Activities & Projects for 2021 - 2022

Ark Expansion Plan, phase II: Administration Professionalisation Project

Introduction

In October 2020 Ark's Board voted unanimously to proceed with phase two of the *Ark Expansion Plan*. This involves reviewing and professionalising all our administrative systems. This project will be funded from Ark's capital (see appendix for budget).

Over the last 3 years, Ark has expanded capacity through phase 1 of the plan. This comprised the renovation and adaptation of an additional space in the same building as our existing premises in Amsterdam. This enabled Ark to double its capacity: from offering services for a maximum of 5 children per day, to our current capacity of 10 children per day. The physical expansion was also designed to enable Ark to offer a wider range of professional therapies, including consulting rooms and equipment for visiting specialists.

Phase one of the Plan (expansion of the physical space) has now been successfully completed. However, the Stichting is experiencing growth pains. Day to day administration and organisational processes have become more complex. The current systems have not developed to accommodate the expansion. Processes are often time-consuming and inefficient. Phase 2 of the Plan will streamline and professionalise these aspects of the organisation to allow personnel to focus on the core activities (providing intensive support to children with autism who need the specialised care offered by Ark).

Phase two of the project will be coordinated and managed by Allard Janssen of 'Monoquest'. A business development and IT consultancy. After initial research, a proposal outlining the project's aims and objectives was presented to Ark by Monoquest. This proposal was unanimously approved by the Board. The project description below is based on this initial proposal. It also includes assessments of progress and an outline of decisions made so far. A budget for the various parts of the project is provided below.

Objectives

The primary goal for this project is to improve the current organisational and administrative systems so that personnel can focus on the enhancement of the direct services they provide to children with special needs and their families. Further rapid growth is not a current objective, but rather focussing on greater streamlining, professionalisation and codification of the daily practice and the administrative systems needed to support the recent expansion.

From a broader perspective, however, there are many more children in the Netherlands that would benefit from the uniquely specialised services provided by Ark. These children could be helped if there are more organizations providing similar services. Ark wants to inspire and support entrepreneurial professionals and larger organisations to do so. With this in mind, Ark would like to capture their best practices and business model into a 'manual' so others can benefit from the knowledge and insights they have accumulated over the years. The secondary goal is, therefore, to grow Ark's specific method of childcare by actively stimulating others to get involved in setting up similar organisations. These processes are linked - to achieve this secondary goal, the primary goal of professionalisation and codification is an essential first step.

Approach

Step 1. Investigate the crux of the business and all aspects that make Ark successful.

Step 2. Determine what is needed to support the above in the most efficient and effective way.

Step 3. Identify and engage appropriate professionals and external consultants to undertake the implementation and ongoing support for the new processes and systems.

The following areas of focus for initial improvement and for the sustainability of the organisation were identified:

- **Financial:** overhaul whole financial / accounting / bookkeeping / invoicing systems
- **Organizational:** ANBI status, GDPR compliance, contract management
- **Administration:** file sharing and storage, email system
- **Staff:** option of payrolling for less volatile and labour-intensive staffing and rota management
- **Parent Communication:** more professional and secure data and content-sharing platform



Solutions & Actions approved by the Board

1. Engage a new, more professional bookkeeper with a comprehensive accounting software package. Candidate firm: *Pronk & Alleman Administration & Tax Advice BV*, a member of NOAB (the Dutch Association of Administration and Tax Experts). Comprehensive integrated accounting software system: *Yuki*
2. Seek professional advice and services from fiscal judicial experts to check and amend as necessary Ark's Articles of Association and other legal, fiscal and ANBI documentation. Candidate firm: *RVW Advies*, independent tax lawyers.
3. Engage IT experts to implement and provide on-going support for a new professional cloud-based platform for email, file storage and sharing. Candidate firm: *SolidQ* have worked with Monoquest and the Secretary of Ark's Board on a similar project for a related Stichting. Cloud-based platform: *Microsoft 365 and Microsoft Teams*.
4. Subscribe to and integrate a new smartphone 'app' and information sharing platform specifically designed for educational organisations to communicate with parents about children's progress. Candidate platform: *'Social Schools'*.
5. Employ or engage on a freelance basis a native Dutch-speaking senior manager with professional experience and expertise in corporate, financial, and childcare management duties. Candidate: Sander van Leeuwen. Sander has a background in banking, supporting corporate start-ups, and in care management in our sector. He will begin working one day per week for Ark starting in May 2021.
6. Rent and renovate an additional small multi-purpose room in Ark's current premises to create a private meeting room/administration workspace/additional therapy room.
7. Take greater advantage of the newly created consulting rooms to increase accessibility to additional therapies such as Art, Music, Speech and Physical Therapies. Such therapies are not funded through our current funding streams, so would be financed from donations and from Ark's reserves.
8. Set aside sufficient reserves to cover 4 months running costs in case of loss of funding.

Potential future (Phase III) Expansion Plan Projects

1. **Respite Care.** Ark's Orthopedagoog has begun a new project providing overnight respite care. Ark is supporting this project and exploring possibilities for providing financial support either in the form of a donation, subsidising premises costs, or by taking over various contracting and administrative aspects of the business.
2. **The Ark Manual** (see outline in Introduction above)

Budget

Description of Consultancies and Project Components	One-off Fees/costs	Additional annual running costs
Monoquest: project management, coordination & oversight; research & writing 'onboarding' manuals for 'Social Schools' platform; research & development of new privacy policy, statement and staff training protocols.	€ 8.000	
RVW Advies: legal/fiscal advice on ANBI and new Wet Bestuur en Toezicht Rechtspersonen; review liability insurance cover. Ongoing general legal/fiscal advice	€7.000	€ 2.500
Fanoy Forsthövel Notarissen: review and re-draft Articles of Association, including English Translation	€ 2.500	
SolidQ: design proof of concept demonstration for moving all Ark's file storage & document sharing to Microsoft 365 environment; organise Microsoft licenses and accounts; set up new professional email system, provide IT support for initial set-up; migrate all Ark data and emails to Microsoft 365. Ongoing IT support and microsoft tenant service	€ 9.300	€ 1.200
Additional office/Meeting Room: renovate and equip additional space in Camelot Campus Sloterveerlaan 1; Annual rental and service costs	€ 5.600	€ 1.800
4 months emergency running costs: contingency for loss of funding	€194.000	
Additional Resources & Equipment: for Art Therapy, Music Therapy, Physiotherapy and general development	€4.500	
Pronk & Alleman: Financial administration & Yuki subscription		€2.000
Art Therapist fees: 2 x weekly sessions x 42 weeks		€ 5.040
Music Therapist fees: 2 x weekly sessions x 42 weeks		€ 5.040
Physiotherapist fees: 4 x weekly sessions x 42 weeks		€ 11.760
Additional part time admin & care manager		€ 25.200
Total one-off project costs	€ 231.900	
Total additional annual running costs		€ 54.540