



”Goe Gespeeld!” campaign

The “Goe Gespeeld!” campaign, literally translated as “Well Played” emphasises the importance of adventurous and outdoor play for children. The overprotection of children keeps them away from playing outside. The main message is that play can be a little dangerous or dirty, but above all: it’s fun to play outdoors!

The campaign works on several levels: local playgrounds, parents, children and local governments. This paper focusses on the methods used, which are playful and therefore different from other campaigns. This campaign is continued year after year, and is now supported by most of the major Flemish youth organisations and a significant part of the local municipalities.



“Well Played” campaign banner

In 2009 VDS started the “Goe Gespeeld!” campaign together with several other youth organisations¹ from Flanders. The campaign is an answer to the growing intolerance towards children’s play. Cooperation with other youth movements, children’s rights organisations and supporting organisations from the youth field started to support this campaign.

The campaign is a plea for play. The title in Dutch “Goe Gespeeld!” is a word game. “Goe” is an abbreviated form of ‘Goed’, good, since playing is never finished. The campaign supports youth workers and local policy makers and promotes adventurous and outdoor play.

¹The participating organisations throughout the years are:
Vlaamse Dienst Speelpleinwerk (VDS), De Ambrassade, Kind en Samenleving, KSJ-KSA-VKSJ, Scouts en Gidsen Vlaanderen, Chirojeugd Vlaanderen en Mediaraven.

To achieve that goal, the campaign advises on good play practices, related to outdoor play: climbing in trees, safety, dirty play, the importance of exercise, playing in a green and natural environment, taking risks, organized and non-organized play etc.

This information and background is the basis for local youth organisations, youth councils and youth policy makers to create a stimulating policy on outdoor and adventurous play. This is our way to advocate and successfully implement play on several levels.

Campaign methods

The campaign reaches out to the different target groups directly, by deploying a variety of convincing methods.



The booklet

The different campaign topics are elaborated in a colourful and inspiring booklet. This booklet contains research results, inspiring books and resources, images and practical advice about many topics that are related to adventurous and outdoor play. The booklet is used as inspiration for youth workers and interested policy makers as a source of inspiration on this topic.

The political party and the charter

The “Goe Gespeeld!” political party was founded in 2012. This party consisted uniquely of children and youth workers. There was a real party charter, a president and a press conference for the announcement of the party. Other political parties could make an alliance with the “Goe Gespeeld!” party, to show their interest in the theme and to translate the ideas to their own party charter.

The message of the “Goe Gespeeld!” party was spreaded out through local policy level. All of the 308 local municipalities in Flanders and Brussels were encouraged to sign the charter and become a “Goe Gespeeld!” village, town or city. The charter contains 8 targets for the local policy: “In our municipality...

1. ***... all children play in public space.***

Play in public space is more than an occasional play event. The street is not only owned by cars, but functions as play and meeting space. Squares are more than parking lots, they are a place for play and meeting. Our municipality mixes the functions of public space.

2. ***... all children play in a green environment.***

Children and youngsters need direct contact with nature. That is essential for their development, health, physical fitness but also to make them aware of the value of nature and environmental issues. The green spaces in our community are therefore as accessible as possible. Play areas in forests are nice, but not the only solution.

3. ***... playing is not seen as nuisance.***

Playing children are noisy by nature. We give children the space needed to play fully. Children's play cannot be restricted by intolerance of adults.

4. ... **children can move around safely**

For children, being able to bike or walk on their own, is a good alternative for the rear seat of their parents' car. Therefore, we want to create a network which connects formal and informal play spaces and play impulses in town. This network connects play spaces with the other places where children go, such as schools, libraries or swimming pools.

5. ... **there is sufficient space for organised youth work.**

Many of our children and youngsters participate in the activities of youth movements, youth clubs and animated playgrounds. We provide enough play spaces for these organisations.

6. ... **policy makers create a positive atmosphere towards play.**

Although play is essential for children and youth while growing up, many adults grow increasingly intolerant towards children's playing. In our municipality, we want to advocate children's play, for example through a campaign, to stimulate a positive attitude towards children. Local policy makers create *space* for children's play. They ensure physical space is available in the streets or in nature, and also encourage the mental space in the heart and mind of every citizen.

7. ... **every policy measure takes children and youngsters into account.**

Policy measures can have unexpected side effects. Every new policy measure is checked for potential disadvantageous effects on children. Our policy makers look through the eyes of children and youngsters to shape the new measures and predict their effects.

8. ... **children participate in the development of public space.**

Public space is a scarce resource. Space is needed for homes, for working, for leisure time, for industry, for agriculture etc. Our municipality adapts the public space not only to adults, but also to children and youngsters. They participate in shaping the public space.”



In the mean time a lot of politicians signed the charter, as 56 local municipalities at this moment. A map on www.goegespeeld.be keeps track of the participating municipalities.

> Sven Gatz: Flemish Minister for Youth



Media attention

The campaign draws yearly media attention. One of the themes is elaborated on in a press conference. On this press conference, we make this theme visible through a playful and unusual action. This happens often just before spring or summer, when everyone wants to play outside.

These actions involve a group of children as well as policy makers. This is an overview of the different actions and the themes we have addressed over the years:

- **2010: “Bruises and dirty play”**



More and more parents tend to be concerned about their children becoming dirty while playing: mud games, dirty clothes, full washing machines etc. Furthermore there is a trend to make play more and more safe. How about a being dirty and having a bruise every now and then? Doesn't it make play all the more fun and challenging?

This action, in cooperation with the Flanders' association for families (*Gezinsbond*), makes children dirty on purpose, by playing super fun dirty games. The washing machines (lots of foam, soap, baths) did their job afterwards!

- **2011: “Play in public space”**

Youth leaders are involved in a secret mission: at night, armed with chalk spray and stencils, they make the public space in their town “play proof”. A guerilla movement arises... By daylight the next day, these youth workers accompanied groups of children into the ‘taken’ territory to play.



- **2012: “Well played” charter.**

The charter is released on ‘Play Day’. ‘Play Day’ is one day without television for children: all the children channels are empty and a lot of neighbourhoods organise play activities. The minister of Youth is the first to sign the charter.



- **2013: “Undiscovered play spaces”**

A group of children crosses an abandoned river on a self made wooden raft. The destination? An undiscovered natural playing space. A suggestion to municipalities to unlock hidden and adventurous play spaces on their territory.

- **2014: “Accessibility of play spaces”**

A group of children organises an animated walk to a new natural play space in their city. The play space is great, but not easy and certainly not safe enough to reach. Children have to overcome busy crossroads, unsafe streets and ask for a child-friendly route to play spaces.



31-play

The Belgian implementation of the general comment on Art 31 (Right to play) was linked to the “Goe Gespeeld!” campaign. This general comment was translated as “31 minutes of play”, to symbolize the importance of play at home, school and in the neighbourhoods of the children. Two new charters arose, in cooperation with 14 more organisations than the “Goe Gespeeld!” group. Besides the existing one for municipalities, there are now new charters to defend 31 minutes of play at home and at school.

The plasters

The logo of the “Goe Gespeeld!” campaign is a stamp. These stamps make a powerful and short statement and can be used in a variety of ways.

The “Goe Gespeeld!” plasters are a strong example of the usage of this logo. These bandages were spread throughout the whole youth work field: youth movements, animated playgrounds, youth clubs, holiday camps.. The usage of this stamp on an plaster makes clear that play can be adventurous. A bruise or a scratch caused by playing does not have to be a big deal, as long as it was fun!



Besides the bandages, the logo is also used for T-shirts of youth leaders, for play itself, in mailings, for the publication of good playing pictures. It's a multifunctional and short way to draw attention to the core subject of the campaign.

Conclusion

The ‘Well Played’ campaign is a powerful tool to convince people, on all levels, of the importance of outdoor and adventurous play for children. It began small, by a cooperation between youth organisations, but grew throughout the years into a complete package of different methods, known by ever more people.

There is however still work to do. A change of mind is necessary, both for the parents (to let their children play freely) as for the policy makers (to create sufficient physical and mental space for play). A small campaign for some years is only a drop in the ocean. More actions, tools and publicity are needed for further societal change.