

Foyer nieuwsbrief internationaal (Verzending datum: 24/06/2011)

Welcome to Foyer's international newsletter May-June

From children in a retirement home to a theatre at a bank and Muslim women on bikes, this edition of Foyer's international newsletter brings you the extraordinary!

“Akapella” Intercultural and Intergenerational Youth Camp

Kids from Brussels who spend five days in a retirement home in Flanders and practise their Dutch skills with the local elderly: this has been a very successful formula for several years. This year's eleventh edition of the youth camp also received plenty of media attention.

During the Easter holidays Foyer's [youth work team](#) took eight children from a Dutch-speaking Brussels school to the “Akapella” care centre in the rural town of Kapelle-op-den-Bos. The children come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and in many cases their home language is not Dutch. Speaking Dutch for five days means extra practice for the children and their presence makes the atmosphere at the centre considerably livelier!

The daily programme runs as follows: in the morning the children work at the Akapella newspaper, a paper that comes out only during the camp. They write small articles that they illustrate with photos. At noon the children have lunch together with the Akapella residents. Life in Brussels and at Akapella provide plenty of food for conversation! After lunch each of the children pays a visit to their “own” resident for an in-depth interview of around an hour. The children find out all about the lives of the elderly residents and vice versa. Past, present and future join hands. Children and residents also take part together in afternoon activities such as music quizzes, “games then and now”, preparing snacks, etc.

Obviously, kids also need action. That is why the Akapella camp also takes time for sports and exercise: cycling, swimming and walking in a nearby nature reserve.

This year several radio and TV journalists visited the camp. It featured, among others, on the news on [national television](#) (in Dutch).

For more information on the Akapella youth camp, please contact [Anne-Sophie Van der Bracht](#).

“Crossing” on stage

The pupils of [Vormingscentrum Foyer](#) were introduced to drama this school year. Once a week they left the school to practise and improvise, guided by theatre actor and director Kris Kaerts. They exercised their voices, their breathing, their memory, and discovered the poetics of body language and the adrenalin in percussion.

Kris Kaerts: “For the first time in my career I worked with a group that was completely unfamiliar with theatre. At the beginning I felt that there was an enormous gap that would have to be bridged, so I started taking an interest in all the different types of training that happen at Vormingscentrum. The pupils became used to having me around, and they saw me talking with their teachers. This made a great difference in terms of trust and acceptance.”

Kaerts wrote a mini-script for a 30-minute play, which the pupils acted out in front of their classmates and a few other guests. At a local cultural centre eleven young actors found themselves alone on a real stage for the very first time. And they did perform!

“The topics, the story and the content as a whole of the show “Crossing” are still in a fairly rudimentary stage,” the director explains. “I would like to make a show that gets its main input from the lives of these young people themselves, from the way in which they manage to make their lives in this Babylonian city of Brussels, and from the extraordinarily fascinating history of the Gypsies.

Authors I would like to introduce them to as a source of inspiration are Gabriel García Márquez (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), Jan Yoors (*Crossing*) and Isabel Fonseca (*Bury Me Standing*). I would also love to bring these young people in contact with actors and musicians from outside their school, preferably professional artists.

The current presence of Romanian Roma youth is, in any case, an important historic moment, for themselves as well as for the city. I would like preserve the memory of this arrival: it happened here and now. This is the first generation, these are the people that we want to show, the people with whom the story will continue.

On my previous project I worked with homeless people from Brussels in the beautiful Church of the Beguinage. Perhaps that would make a good location for this new project, too.

“Crossing” is our working title, because the project could turn into a real crossroads if we succeed in setting up this historic theatrical meeting of Roma and non-Roma, people from Brussels and from outside of Brussels, young and old.”

Diversity at Work

Diversity management plans are becoming ever more popular among employers. Foyer is currently developing a diversity programme that can be tailored to the needs of specific companies, organization and institutions.

One of these programmes aims at broadening the horizon of KBC bank employees. Local Molenbeek actor Ben Hamidou performed his show “*Sainte Fatima de Molem*” at the KBC headquarters. At first both the actor and the audience felt a bit awkward, but the play turned out to be a great success.

“It is a pity that the room was not completely full. This show should be obligatory watching for everyone who works here” said one KBC employee, who had brought along her mother. Ben Hamidou, too, was quite taken with the concept: “This is completely new to me. I had never heard of a company that stages a show at its own headquarters. It is true that many companies support cultural events or bulk purchase tickets for staff, often for commercial reasons. Yet this is something else: a bank that invites an artist and a theatrical production and tells staff: come and see this. And on top of that it all happens in Molenbeek, my own back yard, so to speak.”

In May Foyer organized a lunch talk for KBC, inviting a number of local entrepreneurs of immigrant background to come and tell their story. They spoke about the obstacles and problems they had encountered, but also about opportunities and chances that had come their

way. **Hinde Boulbayem** and her father run IC Transport a company that specializes in seafood transport throughout Europe. She also set up an import company that offers a range of biologically grown rice from cooperatives in Thailand. Boulbayem is of Moroccan origin and lives in Molenbeek. She considers Brussels her home town and would like to stay in Belgium: “Actually, I dream of a Brussels of ten million people who meet there and exchange ten million ideas. That’s what we need! We need to learn from one another and use ideas creatively.”

Salvatore Fascianella emigrated from Sicily in 1964 and in 1970 he started a tile company in Brussels. By now this company has grown into a solid SME with various showrooms. Salvatore’s sons Fabrizio and Pepino speak several languages. They went to a Dutch-speaking school in Laeken and were among the very first pupils enrolled in Foyer’s bilingual and bicultural education projects: “Immigrants have contributed much to this country. Italian immigrants, in particular, have had a major influence. After all, 400,000 Italians have come to Belgium, and we were among the first. We have worked hard, but we have also brought along our elegance and taste. Italians introduced pasta, pizza and Italian wines in Belgium in the 1950s and 1960s. And there’s beauty as well: Italian fashion, mosaic tiles in bathrooms. It fits particularly well with Flemish mentality. It is not for nothing that 80 per cent of our customers are from Flanders. It’s all about working hard, but enjoying it afterwards.”

In June Foyer compiled a “*Gluren in Culturen*” programme (“A peek at cultures”) for the Justice Ministry. It consisted of a guided tour of various places of worship in the centre of Brussels and the municipality of Saint Gilles. Two groups of civil servants visited a Greek Orthodox cathedral, a Pakistani mosque, a Vietnamese Buddhist pagoda, and a Catholic church. A responsible of each of these places of worship showed the visitors around and answered their questions.

For more info on Diversity at Work, please contact [Francis Marissens](#).

Ladies who bike

Foyer’s Women’s centre [Dar Al Amal](#) has been running a ladies’ bicycle team for 4 years (in collaboration with the organization Pro Velo). In June they had their annual two-day excursion, which took them on a two-day trip to Vaalbeek and Leuven (some 88 km in total).

The group was highly colourful and diverse, including women between 22 and 67 years of age, some of whom had been part of the team for years, and some of whom had only very recently learned to ride a bike. Cultural origins included Cameroon, Tunisia, Peru, Belgium, the Netherlands, Turkey, Morocco, South Korea and Ecuador. They were even joined by a few men for the occasion!

One of these men was a Cameroonian professional footballer who speaks English, French, Spanish, Indonesian and Bantu. But not everyone was equally athletic. A Tunisian psychologist who had polio as a child managed to cycle almost the entire way on one leg. The colourful Dar Al Amal team elicited many positive reactions, but some passers-by were clearly startled or suspicious. A dozen Muslim women in fluorescent vests, and helmets worn on top of headscarves – it’s not an everyday sight in Flanders.

Thanks to clearly signposted cycle routes, cycling in Flanders can be a delightful experience. Under a clear blue sky, the ladies biked through parks, woods and up and down the hills.

The trip did take its toll on some of the participants. Apart from the lady who had the use of just one leg, there were participants suffering from asthma, diabetes and a double hernia. Yet all of them were very courageous, and the able-bodied participants showed great solidarity. The whole team made it back to Brussels, safe and sound.

For more information on the cycling project, please contact [Dar Al Amal](#).
