



Policy Plan 2023-2024



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Who are we?

Stichting Ark is a not-for-profit individual treatment and guidance centre for children with autism, established in Amsterdam in 2011. We provide specialised treatment and guidance to children aged 3 - 13 years with autism and additional complex developmental disorders. Our focus is on children who, due to their challenges, are exempt from the school system and need constant one-on-one guidance.

As well as requiring specialist care, children who are exempt from school will have limited opportunities to interact with peers and with the wider community. Learning and growing together with others and negotiating relationships with peers are 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 are their core challenges. Limited access to group learning, play and other social activities can exacerbate these challenges and hinder a child's potential for development, independence, and meaningful inclusion in society.

Ark provides the constant one-on-one support these children need, but we do this in the context of a dynamic and stimulating small group setting. We provide a child-centred learning environment with targeted individual 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 to raise awareness in the community and improve responses to all children with special needs.

Our Mission Statement

***"All children have the potential to be great kids.
Our job is to create an amazing world in which this potential can flourish."***

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

Our Objectives

- Treat and support children with autism and additional complex developmental challenges to develop their communication skills and social competence so that they become more independent and included members of society.
- Improving 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 aged 3 - 13 years, who are exempt from school and who have significant developmental delays, usually with disorders of communicating, interacting, and relating (such as Autism, Sensory Processing Disorder, and communication & language delays).

Ark has a *Total Communication Policy*: in addition to Dutch and English, we try to accommodate any other preferred language. We work with a large number of children and families whose first language is not Dutch and who are therefore at greater risk of exclusion or marginalisation. For this reason, our main language of communication is English.

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

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

- The number of children present per day should not exceed 10.
- We cannot offer a place to children if doing so is likely to have a negative effect on other children at Ark.

Ark is unable to offer a place in any of the following circumstances:

The child is :

- younger than 3, or older than 13

The child has :

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

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



Approach & Philosophy

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

We believe that each child has unique strengths to be developed and challenges to be 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 broader 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 and interactions.
- Understand and express a range of emotions.
- Understand and negotiate the world around them.
- Develop adaptive and coping strategies.
- Develop a strong sense of self.
- Use creativity and imagination, think logically, and solve problems independently.

Collaboration

Ark believes in a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach. Parents, other family members/caregivers, 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 made in collaboration with the whole team and consent is sought from parents or legal guardians for each new goal plan. We report daily on each child's responses to the day's activities. Evaluation and progress reports are prepared annually. Goals and strategies are constantly evaluated and revised in collaboration with the team.



Officers & Other Personnel

Board of Directors

Chair - Jill Donkersloot Adler

Secretary - Marieke van Dam

Treasurer - Mark de Jonge

Management Team

Head of care - Sander van Leeuwen

Programme leader - Kevin Walton

Head of Finance - Sander van Leeuwen

Educators & Therapists

Ark works with a creative group of dedicated, talented and experienced staff members as well as freelance educators and therapists. They include remedial educators, psychologists, psychomotoric therapists, occupational therapists, sensory processing therapists, speech therapists, movement therapists, art therapists, music therapists. All have been chosen for their skills and experience and their commitment to our methods, philosophy, and vision.

Location & Opening Hours

The business and visiting address of Stichting Ark is Sloterveerlaan 1 - C101, 1064 GX Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Ark is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, 42 weeks a year. We also offer after school and holiday care outside these times.

Income Streams

Ark Foundation receives income from fees paid indirectly by clients, and when necessary, from donations from individuals and businesses. Ark's clients are the children enrolled for its services. However, since all Ark's clients are under the age of consent, the child's parents or legal guardians will act on the child's behalf. Clients receive funding from the municipalities in the form of a Personal Budget (PGB) or on the basis of an Individual Payment Agreement (IBO). Ark charges fees at standard rates set by municipalities and these fees are paid to Ark through the Social Insurance Bank (SVB) or directly from municipalities. Ark does not charge fees directly to clients.



Asset Management

Client fees are used by Ark to pay the fees and salaries of the professionals who work directly with the children. These fees also cover other day-to-day operating costs of the centre and the administration and management of clients' development and care plans. Other costs, such as for special activities, resources, or equipment, may not be covered by client funds. Ark funds these costs through donations.

Any profits are returned to the Foundation to improve and enrich services to children and their families, and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the organisation and its objectives. These funds are held in a separate savings account at ING Bank. For more details on spending plans for activities and projects for 2023 and 2024, see under "Additional projects for 2023 - 2024).

Remuneration Policy

Ark does not pay bonuses or dividends to personnel or office holders. Statutory duties and activities of members of the Executive Board are not remunerated except for reasonable expenses incurred in carrying out these activities. All other Ark personnel are either salaried and remunerated in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement for youth care, or freelancers. Freelance fees are determined on the basis of reasonable standard rates in accordance with their experience, qualifications, and the nature of the services they provide.

Other policies and protocols

The following policies and protocols are in effect at the Ark Foundation. These are reviewed regularly and may be viewed upon request.

- Health & Safety Policy
- Coronavirus Policies & 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 and Data Protection Policy & Statement

Activities & Projects

- Maintaining and equipping premises suitable for specialised individual treatment and guidance of children with autism and additional complex challenges.
- Providing a playful, child-centred learning environment, with one-on-one supervision by trained professional educators and therapists.
- Providing appropriate equipment, resources, and personnel to run a daily program of individual and small group activities (Mon. - Fri. 09:00 - 17:00) to develop children's communication, language, social skills, daily living 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 therapy, occupational and physical therapy, movement therapy, sensory integration therapy, art therapy, music therapy).
- Providing opportunities for children to interact with peers and establish relationships.
- Providing opportunities for children to interact with the community through visits to shops, museums, libraries, parks, theatres, galleries and other public spaces and facilities (including public transport).
- Providing outreach, family support and counselling services (including after-school and vacation care).
- Monitoring, evaluating, and improving the content and delivery of our programmes, with reference to latest research and good practice guidelines.
- Establishing relationships with schools, local governments, special education needs partnerships, etc. to find appropriate places and support for children when they are ready to move into more mainstream educational settings.
- 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 through workshops for schools and other community organizations, and through our daily engagement with the broader community in Sloterveer, Amsterdam and beyond).



Additional activities and projects for 2023-2024

Objectives

The main goal of the projects is to improve current organizational and administrative systems so that staff can focus on improving direct services to children with special needs and their families. Further rapid growth is not a current objective. Additional activities and projects are aimed at streamlining, professionalising, and codifying daily practices and administrative systems needed to support core activities.

1. Continued services of fiscal/legal advisors to monitor and review tax and ANBI status if necessary.
2. Review and update current privacy and GDPR compliance policies and statements.
3. Maintain sufficient capital reserves to cover ongoing costs in the event of loss of funding, and/or potential costs associated with items 4 and 5 below.
4. The lease on our current space expires in March 2024. Ark must look for a new space and possibly renovate, adapt, and equip it. For Ark, this is the main goal for 2023-2024.
5. The salaried employment project has been initiated and work is currently being done in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement for youth care. Currently Ark is building a workforce at a time of a very challenging labour market. The ultimate goal of implementing this project is to employ a substantial portion of the workforce, currently mostly freelancers.
6. To propagate the Ark working method. There are many more children in the Netherlands who would benefit from Ark's unique specialized services. These children could be helped if there were more organizations providing similar services. Ark wants to inspire and support enterprising professionals and larger organizations to do this. With this in mind, Ark wants to capture their best practices and business model in a "manual," so that others can benefit from the knowledge and insights they have gained over the years. The secondary goal, then, is to grow Ark's particular way of providing childcare by actively encouraging others to get involved in creating similar organizations. These processes are interconnected - to achieve this secondary goal the primary goal of professionalisation and codification is an essential first step.
7. Training of permanent staff. To maintain levels of knowledge, Ark will support employed staff to obtain or enhance DIR/Floortime and other relevant certificates.

Budget for additional project costs

Description of consulting firms and project components	One-time Fees/costs
Employment project: start-up costs for external legal HR advice	€ 7.500
Van den Bosch Business Brokers. This party helps us in the search for a suitable new location.	€ 6.000
Maintain reserves: for contingencies in case of loss of funding, costs associated with employment projects, acquisition, and adaptation of new space, increase in energy costs 2023	€ 200.000
Supplement or replace resources and equipment: for art therapy, music therapy, physical therapy, and general development	€ 3.000
Legal Advice Sandberg Lawyers. Legal support for possible legal action against property owners Woonzorg/Slotermeerlaan	€ 7.500
Meyer Notaries: Adjusted Statutes in connection with updating registration with the Chamber of Commerce.	€2.000
Training/courses Ark will support permanent staff to take relevant courses.	€15.000
Total additional project costs	€ 241.000