

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE	
1. Title of the practice	
Go Team	
2. Organisation responsible for the practice	
Municipality of Mechelen	
3. Contact person(s)	
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4. Summary of the practice	
<p>The Go Team provides support for families and operates in the social services of Mechelen. It was set-up following findings by the local police in 2013 that the care system was not adequately identifying and supporting some families living in extreme poverty.</p> <p>The Go Team includes a number of social workers who work very closely with the families, often undertaking weekly visits. They have lower caseloads so that they can provide this more intense support.</p> <p>The team focusses on families in more severe situations facing problems such as: a lack of adequate housing, unemployment, low school attendance, substance abuse, hygiene problems, and debt.</p> <p>The social workers operate in an integrated way with the families – addressing the multiple issues that they may face. This includes helping users to access services such as benefits, healthcare, and providing support if they must attend court cases.</p> <p>The Go Team has connections to other services. People are referred to the team by the youth and family department of the police, student counselling centres, schools, and government institutions.</p> <p>The team focuses on working with very young children and even pregnant women, because of the recognition of the importance of the very early years for a child's future development. About 50-60 families are reached each year.</p>	
5. National/regional/local context of the practice	
The practice has been developed locally in Mechelen.	
6. Staff involved	
The Go Team is made up of social workers, and has connections to other services for referrals.	
7. Target group	
Families facing severe and complex issues.	

8. Aims of the practice

Provide early-intervention, addressing issues faced by families in an integrated way to improve the wellbeing and development of children.

9. Issues for social services

Service Integration/ Cooperation across services	X	Service Planning		Contracting	
Technology		Skills development (of the workforce)		Quality of services	X
Others: _____					

ANALYSIS OF THE PRACTICE

10. Status

Pilot project (ongoing)		Project (ongoing)	X	Implemented practice (restricted areas)	
Pilot project (terminated)		Project (terminated)		Widely spread practice/rolled out	

11. Scope of the practice

Describe the setting of the practice, considering the following criteria:

- *Micro level practice:* practice that involves individuals at local level
- *Meso level practice:* practice that involves organisations or communities
- *Macro level practice:* practice that involves large population groups

Micro: The project involves a team of social workers, who coordinate with other services in Mechelen (education, health, police, justice).

12. Leadership and management of the practice

Description of the leadership of the practice, considering the following criteria:

- *Collaborative management:* shared between large partnerships, often of central, regional and local representation
- *Organisational management:* by one organisation
- *Professional management:* managed by a single person
- *Shared management:* shared with no defined leadership

The Go Team was set-up by social services in Mechelen.

13. Engaging stakeholders in the practice

Description of the engagement of stakeholders, considering the following criteria:

- *Individual practice:* individuals have sought practice change
- *Network approach:* one or more organisations develop a network
- *Collaborative approach:* large collaboration with relevant stakeholders

Network: The Go Team and social services in Mechelen coordinate with other services (education, health, police, justice).

14. Involvement of service users and their families

Description of the involvement of service users, considering the following criteria:

- *Team involvement:* service users and carers were part of the practice team

- *Consultative: a consultative body of users was set up for an on-going dialogue and feedback*
- *Involvement in care: person-centred approaches to care/support*

Service users are involved through interviews and other feedback mechanisms as part of the evaluation study.

15. Costs and resources needed for implementation

Description of how the practice is financed, considering the following criteria:

- *Within existing resources: staff time and other resources are provided 'in-house'*
- *Staffing costs: costs for staff investment*
- *Joint/Pooled budgets: two or more agencies pool budgets to fund services*
- *Funded project: external investment*

This team costs approximately €380,000 annually and receives funding from the King Boudewijn Institution. It is believed that the preventative work of the team saves costs in the long-term by preventing children being taken into care measures.

16. Evaluation approaches

Description of the evaluation method of the practice, considering the following criteria:

- *Multi-method: use of both a qualitative and a quantitative approach*
- *Single method: qualitative or quantitative approach*
- *Audit: looks at data sources such as existing medical records, and/or other routinely collected service data.*
- *Informal: refers to in-house service evaluation using locally designed tools and/or collecting opportunistic feedback*
- *No evaluation*
- *An evaluation is planned*

The project is evaluated in a scientific way, led by a professor from the Thomas More University.

The process involves qualitative interviews with families and professionals plus quantitative analysis of each case.

Results were measured by comparing the initial situation of each family against the point at which support from the GO team came to an end, it focused on nine criteria:

- housing
- safety
- health of parents
- employment
- income
- debt
- social capital
- cultural capital
- living situation of the children in terms of school, free time and health

Each criteria was scored on a scale from 0-10.

An initial analysis on the return on financial investment is also being carried out.

17. Measurable effects of the practice and what it has achieved for...

Service users	45% of the families were new to social services, indicating that the project has improved outreach and connections with other services. 87.7% of the families experienced an improvement on at least one criteria, whilst 53% improved on at least three criteria.
Formal care givers	
Informal carers	
Organisations	Mechelen received an award for the GO team practice from the King Boudewijn-foundation (very well known in Belgium) for being very innovative and effective in combatting child poverty.
Other	

18. Anticipated or 'aspirational' effects of the practice and what it has achieved for...

This category can include outcomes which are not documented, quantified or properly evaluated. They can include such elements as improved knowledge, quality, workforce, etc.

Service users	Improve the wellbeing and conditions for families and children, leading to better outcomes and preventing situations where children are taken into care measures.
Formal care givers	
Informal carers	
Organisations	More early-intervention and preventative work saves costs in the long-term.
Other	

19. How the practice has changed the way the service is provided (lessons learned)

The Go Team has become a template for the rest of the organisation's work, with concepts of integrated support and guidance recognised as key principles.

20. Sustainability of the practice

Description of whether the practice is sustainable, considering the following criteria:

- *Potential for sustainability:* practice was newly started or is on-going/not yet mainstreamed. How could the practice be sustained (in terms of resources)?
- *Organic sustainability:* service users have been empowered to take the practice forward
- *Established:* the project has been operational for several years

The project is established and will continue running in the city given its success.

21. Transferability of the practice

Description of whether the practice has been transferred, considering the following criteria:

- *Transferred:* transfer to other regions, countries, service user groups, etc.
- *Potential for transferability:* there is interest from the outside; elements of the practice have been taken up and used elsewhere; material for transferability (for ex. training material) has been developed

The cities of Sint-Truiden, Genk and Brussels are looking to copy the example of the GO team in Mechelen.

The practice has also been transferred for other groups of people in Mechelen, including people with mental health problems in poverty, homeless-people and people who are threatened by eviction. It has become part of Mechelen's 'modus operandi'.