

Psychosocial wellbeing for children in Dutch asylum
reception centres
TeamUp Impact evaluation

Final report April 2024

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Executive summary

Background and evaluation questions

TeamUp is a play and movement-based intervention implemented by Save the Children and War Child aiming to improve psychosocial wellbeing for refugee children in asylum centres (AZC) in The Netherlands. It aims to be inclusive for all children aged six to eighteen years through its non-verbal modality. Trained volunteer facilitators provide non-verbal facilitation that follows a predefined structure and set of activities. Each activity fits in with a specific social-emotional or psychosocial theme and has a specific goal related to this. The intervention is grounded in trauma-informed care principles, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) guidelines and theory and evidence on the role of the body and movement in stress relief and social connections.

Save the Children Netherlands commissioned IDS to undertake an impact evaluation of the TeamUp intervention as part of an EU-AMIF funded grant to inform scaling and intervention design. The main evaluation question was:

“How, why and under which circumstances does TeamUp contribute to promoting the psychosocial wellbeing of children¹ in Dutch asylum reception centres?”

We undertook a realist-inspired, collaborative contribution analysis, which is a theory-based evaluation approach that aims to provide a nuanced explanation about how, within its specific context, the intervention works to contribute to the outcomes that are observed. TeamUp’s Theory of Change breaks down psychosocial wellbeing into different components of wellbeing, translated into four outcome areas: sense of safety, increased social connectedness, positive outlook and self-regulation. In order to maximize the opportunity for learning through this evaluation, we collaboratively decided to focus on the causal pathways that explain how TeamUp contributes to increased social connectedness, how a sense of safety is contributing to embodiment and how children build their social awareness through embodiment. We developed three sub-evaluation questions that relate to each of the specific causal hotspots:

1. How, for whom and in what context does TeamUp’s safe space allow children to embody their emotions?
2. How, for whom and in what context does embodiment experienced in TeamUp contribute to children’s social awareness?
3. How are children in Dutch AZCs experiencing social connectedness and what factors play a role in shaping this

We used a case study approach that enabled us to understand deeply how TeamUp works within specific AZC contexts and specific children. Data was gathered across 10 AZCs. We used a bricolage of methods to collect data from children, parents and caregivers, facilitators and COA staff. The methodological bricolage allowed us to utilise the strength of each method and were a mix of participatory and qualitative methods: narrative data from children, most significant change with parents and caregivers, body mapping with children, participatory research with children and semi-structured interviews with TeamUp facilitators and COA staff. To assess the strength of the evidence underpinning the final conclusions we used quality of evidence rubrics that were agreed at the start

¹ We align with the definition of children by UNICEF: any person under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 1990)

of the evaluation with the TeamUp team. Quality criteria were: representativeness, triangulation, uniqueness and plausibility.

Conclusion and findings

Drawing on the findings presented below, we conclude that in the context of Dutch AZCs (where there are high levels of unsafety and uncertainty, a lack of privacy, people from many different cultural backgrounds living together in small spaces) and for children who have experienced stressful life events, TeamUp contributes to promoting psychosocial wellbeing through contributing to increased social connectedness and social awareness. Firstly, it stands out that children increase their cultural awareness by playing with children from different cultural backgrounds in the TeamUp sessions. Through the facilitated games that require them to play together, they learn how to interact with each other across cultures. Secondly, in the context of AZCs where there is often limited space for children to play and a lack of activities, we conclude that TeamUp provides a place for children to feel safe and play games, and that by playing games and having fun in the sessions they relax, especially when there are supportive facilitators, good friends and they play games they enjoy. Children bring the games and sometimes the rules they learn in the TeamUp sessions into their play with their friends outside of TeamUp. Finally, TeamUp contributes to building social connections that are important for the children to deal with the current circumstances, including connections with their peers and with the TeamUp facilitators.

These conclusions are underpinned by findings in response to each of the sub evaluation questions.

Hotspot 1: How, for whom and in what contexts does TeamUp's safe space allow children to embody their emotions?

This hotspot was chosen because it was identified as the unique contribution of TeamUp: the non-verbal play and movement foundation of the intervention in a safe space where children use their bodies to play and interact with other children. We found strong evidence that confirms and explains how TeamUp contributes to embodiment:

1. Children experience a range of emotions, sensations and feelings in their bodies after participating in a TeamUp session.
2. Children can experience sensations of anger, frustration, shock and disappointment in their body after a session. These feelings of hyperarousal can be triggered by the games that they play in TeamUp (e.g. when they play games they do not like) or by how other children play in the games (e.g. cheating or disruptive behaviour from other children). They can be moderated by having friends around that provide a sense of safety.
3. Children can experience sensations of happiness, joy and relaxation after participating in a TeamUp session. For children who arrived in a hyperaroused state (e.g. feeling nervous, angry, scared) the structure of TeamUp and playing games they enjoy allows them to relax and feel happy. Children relax during TeamUp especially because of playing with their friends. Facilitators' abilities to support children displaying disruptive behaviour to self-regulate is important to make the TeamUp session safe for all children.

We rated the strength of evidence underpinning these conclusions as follows:

Table E1 Strength of evidence rating Hotspot 1 conclusions

Dimension	Rating	Reasoning
Triangulation	4	Data for these conclusions came from facilitators and the children. Children's perspectives were gathered from their body mapping and their participatory research duty. The data was not as high quality as it would have been ideally, due to how the bodymapping was completed, which included a high level of interpretation from the evaluation team and there were not as many body maps as originally planned.
Representativeness	3	Data was directly collected from children and facilitators. Children were involved in a first level of analysis by interpreting their own body maps when asked to reflect on their drawing and during reflection session as part of the participatory research journey. To push this ranking to a 4 there should have been a further analysis with children and facilitators on the body map data following each session.
Uniqueness	5	The questions here were very specific about TeamUp. What makes this particularly strong is that we have explanations from the children and facilitators about what factor might prevent the outcome from occurring (e.g. the initial frame of mind of the children at the start of the session, states of hyperarousal, facilitator skills)
Plausibility	4	Close to a 5, but we used theory to fill some of the explanatory gaps. There is also an element of embodiment that means that a causal explanation will be hard due to the 'invisible nature' of this process.

Source: Authors' own

Hotspot 2: How, for whom and in what context does embodiment experienced in TeamUp contribute to children's social awareness?

This causal hotspot was identified as a continuation from the previous hotspot, theorising that through embodiment in the games, children learn about their own and other's emotions, which increases their social awareness. We found strong evidence that TeamUp contributes to building social awareness, but less for the causal pathway as originally theorised:

1. TeamUp contributes to children developing social awareness. In a context where children are exposed to children from many different cultural backgrounds, playing together with other children from mixed cultural backgrounds through facilitated games, allows the children to learn about others' behaviours and emotions. This leads to them learning that they can all play together, regardless of their background.
2. The culture of violence, aggression and cultural silos that often seems to exist in Asielzoekerscentra (Asylum reception centres) (AZC's) can spill over into TeamUp sessions. The presence of good quality and enough facilitators can ensure the AZC culture does not interfere with TeamUp's ability to contribute to the development of social awareness. Good quality here refers to their ability to enforce the TeamUp structure.

3. TeamUp's non-verbal modality may contribute to social awareness being developed through mirroring and other bodily feedback processes between children. However, we did not have strong evidence to confirm this causal pathway.

We rated the strength of evidence underpinning these conclusions as follows:

Table E2 Strength of evidence rating Hotspot 2

Dimension	Rating	Reasoning
Triangulation	4	Conclusion 5 and 6 are underpinned by data from different sources (parents and caregivers, children, facilitators, COA) that are corroborated to establish connections between intervention and outcome, whereas conclusion 7 does not have the underpinning from multiple data sources.
Representativeness	5	The conclusions represent nuanced and contradictory views that indicate that the unique viewpoints of participants are represented. There is less agency in this complicated context of evaluation in asylum centres where people have less agency. There was more involvement in analysis of the data by children interpreting their experiences in their participatory research journey.
Uniqueness	5	Clear explanation of uniqueness of what happens in terms of structure and games in TeamUp sessions and how they contribute to building social awareness in children (e.g. explicitly bringing together children in a group across different cultures).
Plausibility	5	Strong evidence that provides a strong plausible, logically signposted story of key steps underpinned by data of how TeamUp contributes to development of social awareness.
	2	In relation to a causal pathway about how embodiment specifically links TeamUp and social awareness, we have less evidence. The explanation shows a possible connection based on theoretical explanation and some indication from the data from this evaluation and previous TeamUp evaluations.

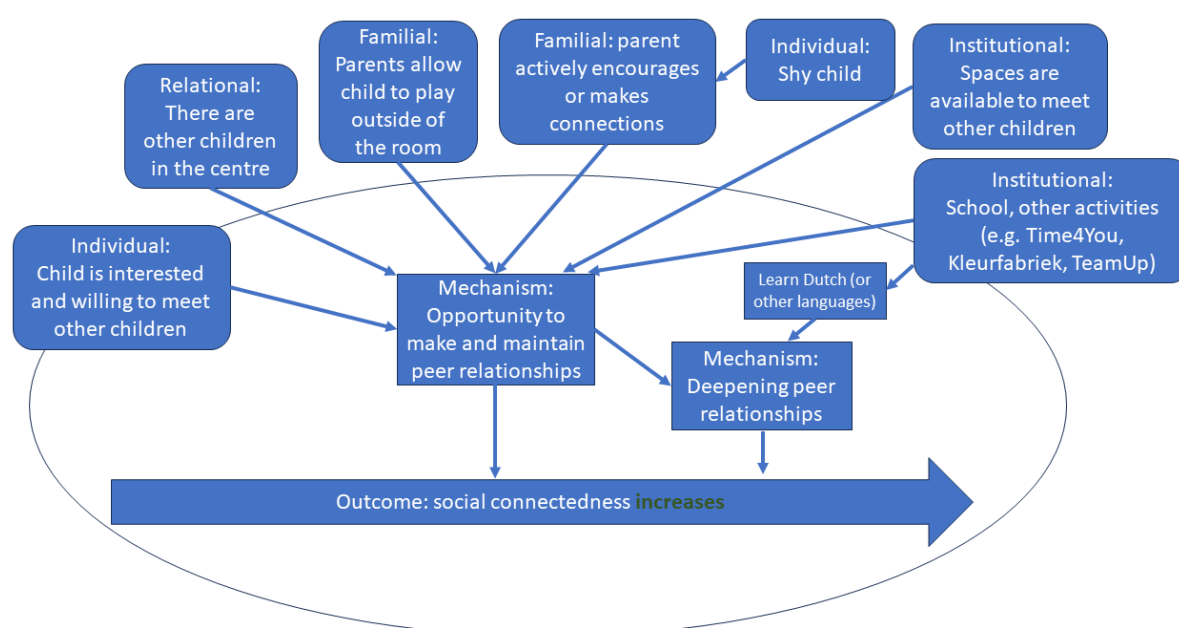
Source: Authors' own

Hotspot 3: How are children in Dutch AZCs experiencing social connectedness and what factors play a role in shaping this?

The framing of this causal hotspot was intentionally broad and open-ended in order to explore the broader context of the AZC that contributes to social connectedness and identify if and in what way TeamUP is a contributing factor within this context. By decentering the TeamUp intervention, we were able to gather strong evidence on TeamUp's contributing role in social connectedness:

1. Children experience a web of social connectedness: Children's primary source of social connectedness is their parents/caregivers and other family members. Additionally, they establish close bonds with children with similar characteristics in the AZCs. Other significant adults can also become sources of social connection, including TeamUp facilitators when they are regular and long term and/or live in the same AZC.
2. A number of contextual factors influence children's opportunities to develop and maintain relationships with peers in the AZC. These include: individual (wanting to make friends), relational

(there are other children in the centre), familial (parents/caregivers allow to play outside/actively encourage building relationships) and institutional (there are spaces for children to meet and/or activities to do) factors. Being able to speak the same language helps deepen these relationships and strengthens the sense of social connectedness. TeamUp is an important activity where children meet new friends and have the space to play with existing friends. TeamUp can also contribute to learning Dutch.



3. Another set of contextual factors interfere with the opportunity to make or maintain relationships with their peers, resulting in reduced social connectedness. These include: individual (lost interest in making friends/being shy), relational (no other children with in the AZC), familial (parents/caregivers not allowing children to play outside their room) and institutional (unsafe AZC, no spaces for children or activities organized) factors.
4. TeamUp contributes to increased social connectedness as part of a broader causal package of factors, including parental and caregiver support, school and other AZC spaces and activities. Especially in situations where there are no or little opportunities for children to make and maintain peer relationships, TeamUp can create conditions to provide opportunities for children to make, maintain and deepen peer connections. This includes: being a space that families allow their children to go to, providing a safe space for children to play with their friends, putting shy children in a group with other children they can connect with.

We rated the strength of evidence underpinning these conclusions as follows:

Table E3 Strength of evidence rating Hotspot 2

Dimension	Rating	Reasoning
Triangulation	5	Conclusions are based on high quality data from children and parents/caregivers. We've collected detailed data from parents/caregivers and children that informed the conclusions. This may

		be the first time that parents'/caregivers viewpoints are this strongly represented in a TeamUp evaluation.
Representativeness	5	The conclusions represent a variety of sometimes contradicting viewpoints about how social connectedness is developed, based on children's characteristics and institutional context. Some level of agency through the narrative approach (means participants decide what they want to share) and the additional analysis sessions that were done on the data with parents/ caregivers and children.
Uniqueness	5	Clear detail on contextual factors that contribute to social connectedness and clear explanation about how TeamUp fits within this across different locations and for different children
Plausibility	4	TeamUp has links to the outcome of social connectedness, but the causal links are more nuanced because of all the other contextual factors that contribute to social connectedness of the children. In situations where there are fewer other opportunities, the contribution of TeamUp can be stronger.

Source: Authors' own

Table of Contents

Executive summary.....	2
Background and evaluation questions.....	2
Conclusion and findings.....	3
1. Introduction.....	11
1.1 Evaluation questions.....	11
1.2 Contribution analysis approach	12
1.3 Theory of change and causal hotspots	13
2. Evaluation design and methodological bricolage.....	17
2.1 Case study design	17
2.2 Methodological bricolage responding to causal hotspots	19
2.2.1 Round 1 methods: stories of change in social connectedness.....	20
2.2.2 Round 2 methods: case studies and participatory research	22
2.3 The need for methodological reflexivity.....	24
2.4 Agreeing criteria to assess quality of evidence.....	25
3. Findings.....	27
3.1 Main case study findings on embodiment, social awareness and social connectedness	27
3.1.1 Location 1.....	27
3.1.2 Location 2.....	31
3.1.3 Location 3.....	36
3.1.4 Location 4.....	41
3.2 Main findings on social connectedness amongst children in Dutch AZCs	44
3.2.1 Parents and caregivers' stories of change in their children's social connectedness	44
3.2.2 Stories about social connectedness from children	52
4. Responses to evaluation questions.....	58
4.1 Factors shaping social connectedness of children in Dutch Asylum centres.....	58
Conclusion 1: A web of social connectedness for children in Dutch AZCs	58
Conclusion 2: A range of opportunities to make and maintain peer relationships increase social connectedness	59
Conclusion 3: A range of factors prevent opportunities for social connectedness	61
Conclusion 4: TeamUp as part of a broader causal package supports children's social connectedness	62
4.2 Embodiment and social awareness	63
Conclusion 5: TeamUp contributes to development of social awareness.....	64
Conclusion 6: The AZC culture and TeamUp structure interplay in development of social awareness	64
Conclusion 7: Causal relationship between embodied experiences and development of social awareness remains unclear	65
4.3 Safety and embodiment	65
Conclusion 8: An interplay between other children, facilitation and games, contribute to children becoming hyperaroused in TeamUp	67
Conclusion 9: A safe TeamUp session opens the window of tolerance	67

4.4 Evidence for other outcomes: self-regulation, positive outlook, relationship skills and positive experiences are created.....	68
5. Overarching conclusions	69
6. Recommendations	71
Strategic recommendations	71
Intervention design recommendations.....	72
Intervention implementation recommendations	74
References.....	76
Annexes.....	82
A1. Quality of evidence rubrics	82
A1.1 Plausibility.....	83
A1.2 Representativeness.....	83
A1.3 Triangulation	84
A1.4 Uniqueness	85
A2. Data collection tools.....	86
A2.1 Prompts children's stories.....	86
A2.2 Most Significant Change template	86
A2.3 Interview questions TeamUp facilitators	88
A2.4 Interview questions COA contact person.....	89
A2.5 Body map template	90
A3. Quality assessment of methods in design phase	91
A4. Changes identified by parents/caregivers	93
A5. Methodological considerations	95

How to read this report:

We tried as much as possible to do justice to the richness and the nuance of the information that children, parents and caregivers, facilitators and COA contact persons provided (and for some, engaged in producing), in writing the report, whilst trying to keep it accessible. For readers who are mainly interested in learning quickly what the findings are, the executive summary is written for this. For readers who want to understand the deeper underlying theories used and developed, we recommend reading section '1.3 Theory of change and causal hotspots' and section '4 Response to evaluation questions'. We have written these as much as possible to be understandable without having to read all the detailed findings. For readers who are interested in the methodological approach, we recommend reading sections '1.2 Contribution analysis approach' and '2. Evaluation design and bricolage of methods applied'. Finally, for the detailed findings and to dive deeper into the children's, parents and caregivers', facilitators' and COA's voices, please read section '3 Detailed findings'.

Abbreviations

AZC	Asielzoekercentrum (Asylum reception centre)
CA	Contribution Analysis
COA	Centraal orgaan opvang Asielzoekers (Central body for the housing of refugees in the Netherlands)

MHPSS	Mental Health and Social Support
MSC	Most Significant Change
MEAL	Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning
ToC	Theory of change

Different teams referred to in this report

Evaluation team – consisting of Mieke Snijder and Marina Apgar from IDS and the Centre for Development Impact, and Tom Zwollo and Cristina Zabolotnic from the Save the Children TeamUp MEAL team

National TeamUp team – regional coordinators, team leader, manager, programme developer

TeamUp Global Team – TeamUp team hosted at War Child

Data collection team – Tom Zwollo, Cristina Zabolotnic and specifically recruited for this evaluation: Lena Shariff, Anna (Minambu) Mitiri, Naz Hami, Nesmah Naji, Şükran Kizilcabel, Asma el Tayeb

We would like to extend our gratitude to all the parents, children, facilitators and COA staff who participated in this impact evaluation. Without their generous input this evaluation would not have been possible. We would also like to thank from the bottom of our hearts the data collection team, Lena, Anna, Naz, Nesmah, Şükran and Asma, who went above and beyond in the time they contributed to this evaluation. Their commitment and enthusiasm for this work and for TeamUp generally is inspiring and it was a great pleasure to work with these inspiring women.

1. Introduction

The Netherlands receives roughly 50,000 refugees a year. The majority come from Syria (41%). Others come from Iraq (4%), Turkey (8%), Yemen (6%), Eritrea (5%). The current situation is regularly described as the country being in a ‘refugee crisis’ with more asylum seekers entering the country than the system can process. This leads to overcrowding of crisis and short-term crisis accommodation and people staying in these locations for longer periods than the few weeks that they are designed for. Investigations into the living situations of asylum centres have described them as challenging: living in situations with little privacy, with many people from around the world and different cultural background in small spaces. People live with high levels of uncertainty due to having to wait for their procedure and many having had heavy experiences in their home country and during their flight from their country (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, 2024). For children in these situations, they often deal with high levels of mental distress due to experiences of stressful life events, which might lead to post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, emotional and behaviour problems (Asamoah & Gardeniers, 2023; Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Marley & Mauki, 2019).

In response to this situation, TeamUp was developed by Save the Children, War Child and Unicef in 2015 to fill a gap left in service provision in Dutch Asylum centres (Azielzoekerscentra, AZC) to provide mental health and psychosocial support to refugee children. “TeamUp is a movement-based psychosocial group intervention that encourages learning through doing, playing, and moving together. The intervention includes various group games, sports-based activities, dance & creative movement, routines, songs, body awareness, and breathing practices to contribute to the social, physical, mental, cultural and emotional well-being of children.” (TeamUp, 2020b, p. 7). The intervention is grounded in trauma-informed care principles, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) guidelines and theory and evidence on the role of the body and movement in stress relief and social connections. Since 2018, TeamUp has been on a pathway to become evidence based, starting with a process evaluation in 2018 (Bleile et al., 2021), evaluation of TeamUp in schools in the Netherlands (TeamUp, 2020a) and a quasi-experimental study in Uganda. To inform scaling and intervention design, TeamUp Netherlands Team commissioned IDS to undertake an independent impact evaluation of TeamUp in Dutch Asylum Centres from mid 2023 to early 2024.

1.1 Evaluation questions

The evaluation aimed to answer the question: “How, why and under which circumstances does TeamUp contribute to promoting the psychosocial wellbeing of children² in Dutch asylum reception centres?” The sub questions it aimed to answer are:

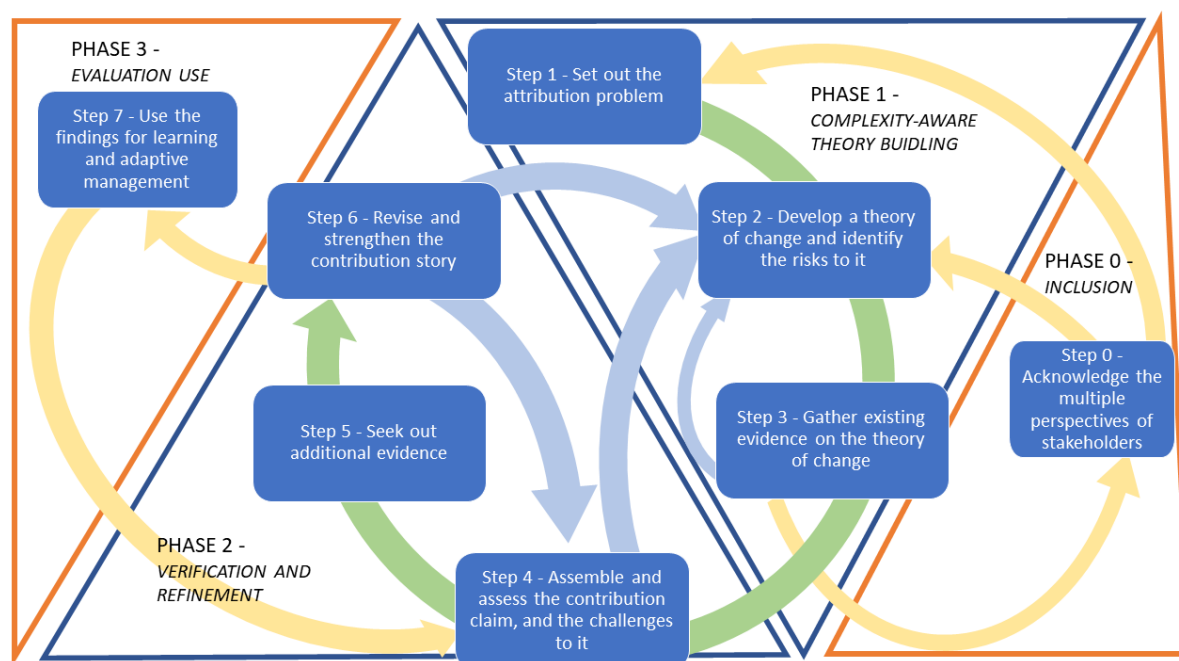
1. How, for whom and in what context does TeamUp’s safe space allow children to embody their emotions?
2. How, for whom and in what context does embodiment experienced in TeamUp contribute to children’s social awareness?
3. How are children in Dutch AZCs experiencing social connectedness and what factors play a role in shaping this?

² We align with the definition of children by UNICEF: any person under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 1990)

1.2 Contribution analysis approach

For this evaluation we used a contribution analysis approach, following the steps laid out in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Contribution analysis steps



Source: (Ton, 2021)

Contribution analysis is a theory-based approach, through which evaluation explores specific causal assumptions as defined in an evidence-based theory of change at the outset. As an approach it builds causal explanations from the empirical findings. The output includes updated theories which explain how the intervention has worked within particular contexts. This approach was chosen because it is well suited to interventions that are flexible and when outcome pathways are influenced by many contextual conditions. We implemented the contribution analysis steps as follows:

Phase 0 (Step 0: acknowledging multiple perspectives of stakeholders May 2023) – the multiple stakeholders relevant to the evaluation were already identified in the ToR. We held additional conversations with the TeamUp MEAL team to identify the different stakeholders who needed to be engaged during the evaluation, which included the national TeamUp team, the Global TeamUp team, COA, TeamUp facilitators, children, and their parents/caregivers. We engaged the Global TeamUp team at the start of the evaluation. We shared the focus and approach of the evaluation with them and explored their interests. We involved the national TeamUp team closely in the inception phase during which we defined the causal hotspots and refined the evaluation focus.

Phase 1 (iterative steps 1 to 4: developing theory of change, identifying existing evidence and assembling initial contribution claims May-July 2023) – We held a series of workshops with the national TeamUp team during which we collectively detailed the causal pathways starting from the existing TeamUp Theory of Change and its evidence base. This involved specifying the outcomes and describing what these outcomes look like when they present themselves in the children, based on the experiential knowledge of the facilitation team and existing MEAL data. Next, we detailed the causal pathways from the intervention to the specified outcomes, reaching sufficient level of detail, to identify causal hotspots to focus where empirical work would provide the most value. Building on the experiential knowledge of regional coordinators, the exercise allowed us to sequence the outcomes and identify assumptions about how they link to the elements of the TeamUp intervention as well as to explore

initial hypotheses about the key contextual factors that play a role. During the session, we visualised the causal pathways on a Miro board:

<https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVMKctHyA=/?moveToWidget=3458764554417464957&cot=14> .

We agreed on four causal hotspots where the evidence base is the weakest and where the team was particularly interested to learn from empirical inquiry. We then wrote up the causal pathways, explored literature and identified evidence from previous TeamUp evaluations for each of the causal hotspots to fill gaps and identify any remaining gaps. This process led to the identification of three causal hotspots³ that then formed the focus of the impact evaluation (see section 1.3).

Completing this phase included the development of realist-inspired programme theories to detail each of the causal hotspots and the underlying assumptions within them to move to appropriate choice of methods for primary data collection.

Phase 2 (*iterative steps 4 to 6: seeking out additional evidence July 2023 – February 2024*) – In this phase we used multiple methods to investigate each causal hotspot (see section 2). This was done in two rounds, where findings and reflections from Round 1 informed final data collection and analysis in Round 2. In our initial plans, we assumed we would redesign Round 2 based on the results from Round 1, however, due to time limitations this was not feasible.

Phase 3 (*evaluation use step 7: Use the findings for learning and adaptive management February – April 2024*) – this report will be disseminated to various stakeholders, including children, TeamUp facilitators, the donor, COA, Save the Children, TeamUp global team and TeamUp national team. Through a series of reflection sessions, the evaluation team will then co-develop recommendations specifically relevant to the key stakeholders.

1.3 Theory of change and causal hotspots

Ultimately, TeamUp aims to improve the psychosocial wellbeing of children in AZCs. Psychosocial well-being refers to the interrelation of psychological and social aspects of a person's life, encompassing their emotional, mental, social, and spiritual health (Dodge et al., 2012; Kostelny & Wessells, 2008). It involves the ability to manage thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and interactions with others in a way that leads to positive self-esteem, satisfying relationships, and resilience against stress and adversity. This concept recognises that an individual's mental health is not only influenced by internal psychological factors but also by their social environment, including relationships with others, community involvement, and cultural or societal norms (Dodge et al., 2012; Ryff, 1989). Achieving psychosocial well-being means having the resources, both internal and external, to navigate life's challenges while maintaining a sense of purpose, belonging, and well-being.

TeamUp's existing ToC includes four main outcomes that together lead to improved psychosocial wellbeing: 1) feeling safe and protected; 2) social connectedness is strengthened; 3) self-regulation improves and 4) positive outlook improves (TeamUp, 2020c). We present the initial theory behind the three hotspots which zoom into specific parts of the pathways and explain how the outcomes are assumed to be achieved and what role TeamUp is thought to play in achieving them (the contribution story). As is shown via the citations in the descriptive text that follows, the first of the three hotspots with the more proximate outcome of creating a 'safe space', is built upon a stronger evidence base from within TeamUp's own MEAL system and broader literature. For hotspot 3 relating to longer term outcomes of social connectedness, the initial evidence base was much weaker.

³ The fourth causal hotspot was positive outlook. For pragmatic reasons it was decided by the evaluation team to not include that hotspot in the current evaluation.

Hotspot 1: Safe space and embodiment

This theory suggests that the TeamUp process of creating a physically, psychologically and socially safe environment enables children to feel safe. Psychological safety gives children the ability to express their full selves because they trust that they will be accepted by others. When children feel physically safe, they will start playing the games, because they believe they will not get hurt and that they can use their bodies in a way that allows them to play. When children feel socially safe, they will play with other children because they are not threatened by them. This overall sense of safety will result in the children moving their bodies in the games and playing with other children (Levine & Land, 2016). As a result, they will experience relaxation because of the processes in the sympathetic nervous system, helping children to move out of the fight-flight response (Levine & Land, 2016; Van Der Kolk, 2018; Verrault, 2017). Being more relaxed and enjoying themselves in the game then leads to a reduction in stress, depressive symptoms, and other negative emotions (Levine and Land, 2016 and TeamUp's own evidence). This relaxation and reduction in negative symptoms in a space where they feel psychologically and physically safe, allows the body to become liberated to move freely, letting their guard down, which will then allow them to open up space to let others in, physically and emotionally (Levine and Land, 2016).

Embodiment refers to the idea that emotions, memories, and other experiences (including trauma) are held in the body (Blain et al., 2023; Van Der Kolk, 2018). It counters common Western thought around separation between mind and body and acknowledges that emotions are experienced in the body as physiological, psychological, biological responses to the environment. Social embodiment theory states that most of our emotional processing happens subconsciously in our body through non-verbal and internal processes through our sensorimotor interactions with the world (Lakens, 2014). TeamUp applies a trauma-sensitive approach and acknowledges that “ongoing exposure to stressful life events and the aftermath of traumatic events can have significant impacts on the body and mind” (TeamUp, 2020c, p. 11). Response to stressful life events can result in mental distress which can be experienced within the body as physiological, psychological, biological, cultural, or relational reactions. This embodied response may include psychosomatic symptoms alongside the inability to self-regulate the autonomic nervous system and emotions, resulting in states of dissociation, numbing, relational disconnection, changed perceptions, or nonverbal internal experiences which affect every-day functioning (O’Brien & Charura, 2023). A recent meta-synthesis of studies on body-based trauma-interventions for refugees reported that movement helped refugees to tell their story and externalise their emotions as well as release trauma-related energy that was trapped inside their body (Schaeffer & Cornelius-White, 2021).

Table 1 Context-Intervention-Mechanism-Outcomes of how safe space contributes to children embodying their emotions

Context	Intervention	Mechanisms	Outcome
In a context where children feel physically, psychologically and socially safe because of the structure, space and consistency in facilitators' presence and there are no physical obstacles	...they play games with other children facilitated by adultsthrough which they experience relaxation (their sympathetic nervous system moves out of fight-flight mode) and negative symptoms are reduced (stress, depressive symptoms, anger)...	...which results in releasing stress and tension or them feeling freer in their body to move, letting their guard down and opening up space for others

Source: Authors' own

Hotspot 2: Embodiment and social awareness

This part of the initial programme theory assumes that in TeamUp, when children move and play together with children from other cultures that they don't normally play with, they see how others are responding to them or mirroring their behaviours and emotions which in turn leads them to 1) become aware of themselves and their own emotions; and 2) when there are multiple interactions with the same children they experience other children's emotions through attuning to their emotions. When children are attuning to others their social awareness increases. Through movement and play, hidden social dynamics and individual experiences are surfaced and when behaviours are mirrored, positive affect is triggered, but only when the child's body is in a relaxed state and can let their guard down, creating space to let others in (see causal hotspot 1). Only when children are aware of their own emotions can they start developing empathy for others, but in turn, empathy also helps children to learn more about their own emotions and sensations by seeing this in others (Zhao, 2012).

Social awareness is a skill that involves perceiving and understanding the emotions, needs, and behaviors of others in social situations, including those from different backgrounds, cultures and contexts. It involves being attuned to the thoughts, emotions, and social dynamics of those around you (CASEL, 2024). Key components of social awareness include empathy, cultural sensitivity, perspective-taking, showing concern for the feelings of others and identifying diverse social norms (CASEL, 2024). Empathy relates to the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. It involves putting yourself in someone else's shoes, recognizing their emotions, and responding with understanding and compassion. Empathy is a combination of both cognition and affective responses to another person's situation (Shen, 2010; Zhao, 2012). Cultural sensitivity is recognizing and respecting cultural differences and being considerate of other people's social norms and values and adapting behaviours accordingly. Perspective-taking is the ability to see situations from different points of view, the understanding why someone might feel or act a certain way based on their background, experiences, and emotions.

Table 2 Context-Intervention-Mechanisms-Outcome of how embodiment of emotions contributes to increased social awareness

Context	Intervention	Mechanisms	Outcome
In a context where children feel physically, psychologically and socially safe because the structure, space and facilitators are predictable and there are not physical obstacles	...they play games with children from different cultures that they would not always interact with, facilitated by adultsattunement: through physically playing together children attune to each other's emotions and become more fully aware of their own emotions...	...which results in children becoming socially aware of other children, including an understanding of other children's strengths and weaknesses, cultural norms, emotions, personalities etc.

Source: Authors' own

Hotspot 3: Social awareness and social connectedness

This theory is about how TeamUp is contributing to longer term outcomes of social connectedness. It assumes that because children are experiencing other children's emotions by moving with them in a space that is physically and psychologically safe. When they are playing with children from other cultures and genders they don't normally play with and who they might see as different from them, they are in turn able to connect with others outside of TeamUp sessions because they can understand

and relate to others (social awareness). This helps them to establish new relationships, deepen existing relationships and strengthen their social connectedness in the longer term.

Social connectedness refers to the sense of belonging and personal involvement one has within a social group or community (Barber & Schluterman, 2008; Lee & Robbins, 1998). It's about the quality and quantity of relationships and interactions an individual has with family, friends, colleagues, and the broader community. It is not just the presence of social ties, but also the emotional, psychological, and functional support derived from these connections. It is about the perceived closeness that children feel in relation to others, which is a direct result from the relationships they build, form and can maintain and the quality of these relationships. It also includes the degree to which they feel accepted and supported by others. High levels of social connectedness are often associated with improved mental and physical health, as it can provide a sense of security, purpose, and belonging (Marley & Mauki, 2019). A recent process evaluation of a music and sound intervention with refugee children in Dutch schools showed that this intervention increased children's social connectedness, because it strengthened the bonds between children by allowing them to express themselves in different ways and creating songs together (Heynen et al., 2022)

Table 3 Context-Intervention-Mechanisms-Outcomes of how TeamUp might contribute to increased social connectedness

Context	Intervention	Mechanisms	Outcome
In a context where children feel physically, psychologically and socially safe because the structure, space and facilitators are predictable and there are no physical obstacles	...games are facilitated by adults that allow the children to play with the same peers (with whom they might not normally interact, with cultural and gender backgrounds different to theirs) over a period of time...	...which allows them to understand and relate to each other (=social awareness)which results in children establishing and maintaining relationships and feeling connected to each other (=social connectedness)

Source: Authors' own

2. Evaluation design and methodological bricolage

In this section we describe the full methodological design used within the realist contribution analysis approach described in Section 1. First, we explain the case study design and justify the approach to case selection as well as providing a detailed description of each AZC location selected as a case focusing on the contextual conditions that are central to the realist programme theories. Next, we provide a detailed view of the mix of methods used as they respond to the causal hotspots and specific evaluation questions. The section ends with a reflection on how the design evolved in response to real life constraints and opportunities, as well as the criteria we agreed to assess the strength of evidence and ensure rigour in the methodological bricolage. Methodological bricolage is the mixing of different elements of various evaluation approaches to create a package of evaluation methods that are best suited to answer the evaluation questions (Aston & Apgar, 2022; Hargreaves, 2021).

2.1 Case study design

Most realist evaluation employs some form of case study research, because studying ‘cases’ enables understanding of phenomena deeply in their specific contexts (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Quality with case study research and evaluation should include making explicit a step described as ‘casing’ by Ragin and Becker (1992) which is the justification for choosing cases that help us link the theoretical with the empirical in response to specific questions. They illustrate that researchers and evaluators use wildly different types of cases and often do not make explicit their choices. Some use cases as empirical units – exploring what is found empirically in an observable case of the specific phenomena, and others view them as theoretical constructs - with analysis aiming to explore or construct theory through cases. In this evaluation we are using ‘causal cases’, in other words cases that contain empirically verifiable outcomes and allow explanation of the causal processes that generate the outcomes. In this sense our cases as both empirical units – the AZCs as places in which we observe the intervention and the outcomes, and children through whom we understand the specific causal processes – and theoretical constructs through our exploration and refinement of the realist programme theories developed in Section 1. It is important to distinguish this approach from ‘sampling research’ which aims to find representative cases. We are not striving for generalisability in this evaluation (it was not selected as a criterion we value) and so our selection strategy is a purposeful information-oriented selection which aims “to maximise the utility of information from small samples and single cases. Cases are selected on the basis of expectations about their information content” (Flyvberg, 2006, p. 230).

We used a nested approach in **four main AZC locations**, where the AZC is a case and within each AZC there are ‘nested’ cases of individual children. The four main locations were selected to provide maximum variation across contextual conditions identified as relevant in the programme theories. The ‘case’ at the higher level is the causal processes through which outcomes emerge from the TeamUp intervention within a particular AZC. In this sense we are concerned with how specific TeamUp sessions as implemented by specific facilitators and participants, interacts with contextual conditions in specific AZC to contribute to the desired outcomes. To support selection, we developed a set of criteria collaboratively with the full TeamUp team and mapped each AZC across these criteria (Table 4). The criteria were based on our initial understandings of the importance of the context of safety (psychological, physical and relational) for the implementation and working of TeamUp in AZCs as well as the stability of the group of children and the facilitators. Within each AZC location we explored two levels empirically: the TeamUp intervention in the AZC location, and experiences of specific children. The methods that were used in each location for the whole TeamUp intervention level were: most significant change with parents/caregivers, children’s research journeys, body mapping, facilitator and COA interviews. The nested cases of children were based on the data that was available including 1) a

story from their parent/caregiver, 2) a body map and 3) who participated in the research journey. This resulted in 1 or 2 nested cases per location.

Additionally, to increase the breadth of this impact evaluation, we selected four additional cases to undertake the first round of data collection of story collection with children in these AZCs. We selected additional AZCs, to lower the burden on the children in the main case study sites as well as to increase the reach of this impact evaluation and develop a deeper understanding of different contextual factors in more AZCs. Details of these AZCs can be found in section 3.2.2.

Table 4 Main cases and criteria for selection of cases

Criteria/ Location	1	2	3	4	5[^]	6[^]
Locations that are less safe*		X				X
Ideal or near ideal examples of where TeamUp is most successful and is a well-functioning AZC				X	X	
Stability of the group, having a core group of children who have been attending for a long time	X				X	
AZC where TeamUp is the only service provided for children		X				X
Emergency location where there are new arrivals but it is relatively stable			X			
Stability of facilitators (who have done follow up training)	X					

* *as judged by the TeamUp team*

[^] *These locations were dropped after Round 1*

Source: Authors' own

We identified safety in the AZC as one of the most important contextual factors that might influence how TeamUp works in that AZC. “Safety entails an environment where one can feel secure, calm, and attend to normal developmental tasks” (Bath, 2015, p. 6). It is about an environment where young people *are safe* and *feel safe*. When we talk about safety in this evaluation it is therefore about the interplay between the atmosphere in the AZC and how safety is perceived by the young people and their parents/caregivers. Young people in other research have described ‘being safe’ as being in a place where they are not exposed to physical threats such as violence, sexual abuse, broken objects (=physical safety) or relational threats such as bullying and harassment from peers and adults (=social safety). ‘Feeling safe’ can be referred to as psychological safety and relates the “physical, emotional, and bodily responses that they experienced when risks were not present” (Moore et al., 2017).

A lack of a safe environment is a known problem in refugee reception centres in Europe more broadly (Milman & Frederiksen, 2023; Oliveira et al., 2019), including Dutch AZCs (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, 2024; Werkgroep Kind in AZC, 2018; Zijlstra et al., 2020). This is caused by incidences of interpersonal violence, poor facilities that cause a lack of privacy and overcrowding, and a fear of authorities due to regularly observed sudden relocations of other people. The mix of people from different cultural backgrounds and languages contributes to a lack of social safety as people (especially those who do not belong to the dominant Arabic population) are not able to connect with others or sometimes get harassed by people from other cultural backgrounds (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, 2024).

Given the lack of safety in many AZCs, it is an important contextual condition to consider in this evaluation. This is in line with TeamUp’s trauma-informed approach, because creating a safe environment is an essential precondition for healing and is a core developmental need for children (Bath, 2015; Hobfoll et al., 2007). In this report we will talk about children being safe when there is a lack of physical or relational threats and being unsafe when these threats are present (Table 5). We

will refer to feeling safe as the emotional, bodily and physical response to the lack of risks and feeling unsafe as the response when these risks are present. Judgements of the extent to which children in the AZC are or feel safe will be based on the assessment of parents and caregivers, facilitators, regional coordinators and children themselves.

Table 5 Definitions of safe/unsafe used in this report

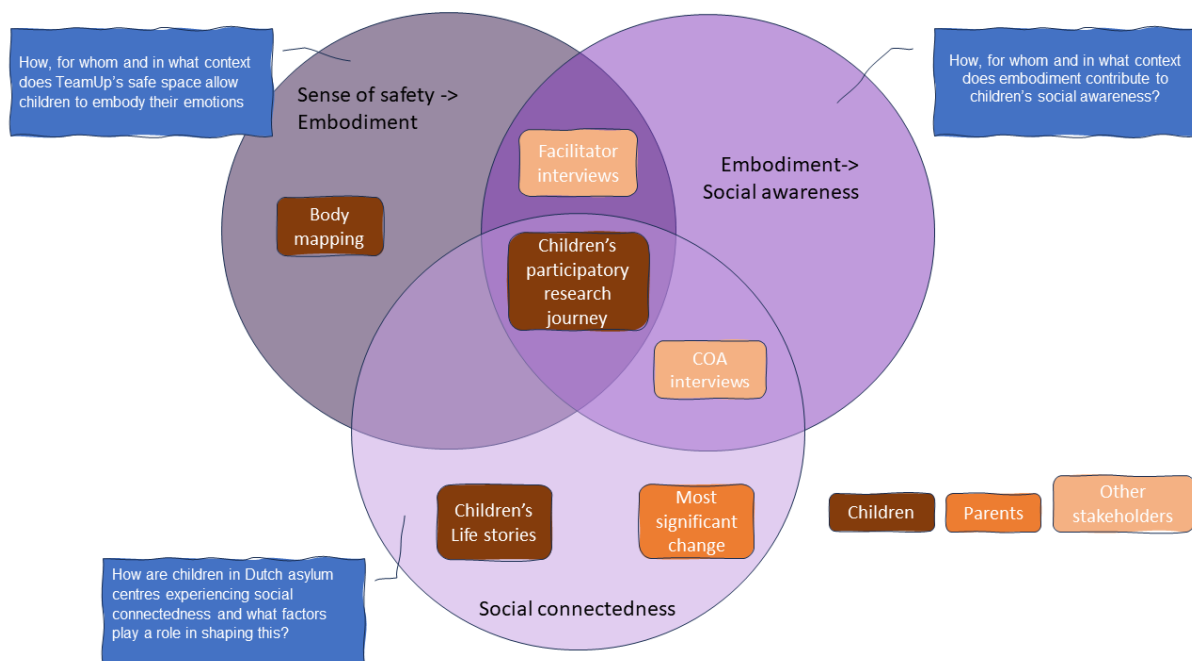
	Presence of threat	Absence of threat
Emotional, bodily and physical response	Feeling unsafe	Feeling safe
Environmental / atmosphere	Being unsafe	Being safe

Source: Author's own

2.2 Methodological bricolage responding to causal hotspots

In line with the overall CA approach described in Section 1, the detailed methodological design responds to each of the causal hotspots, the realist programme theories and corresponding evaluation questions. The mix of methods that responds to each hotspot and question and engages with the main actors (children, parents and caregivers, facilitators and COA) as participants and/or informants are visualised in Figure 2. The circles represent the three causal hotspots, the blue boxes show the specific corresponding question and within the circles are the various methods that were selected, their placement illustrating which causal hotspot they provide evidence for. Each of these are described in the following section.

Figure 2 Causal hotspot, evaluation questions and methods used



Source: Authors' own

The context of the AZCs with their high level of uncertainty required us to use a convenience sample as it was not possible to know beforehand who would be present on the days of data collection. For parents/caregivers and children, we used the list of names of children in the AZC who are invited to join Teamup every week and who have participated in TeamUp as shown by registration in the attendance app. Using this list, we mobilised in a similar way to standard TeamUp sessions: pairs of

data collectors would knock on the door of each parent/caregiver or child on the list and invite them to participate in the evaluation by explaining what it entailed and giving them an information sheet. All parents/caregivers and children who were approached and who said yes were accepted as part of the sample. We invited all the children who were in the TeamUp session at the time to participate in the body mapping. Only children aged 10 years and older were asked to share their reflections with the data collectors. For TeamUp facilitators, the TeamUp MEAL team contacted all facilitators in each case location. Three were selected based on who responded, if more than three facilitators responded, the most experienced facilitators were invited for an interview. Finally, in each location, the key TeamUp COA contact person was invited for an interview.

2.2.1 Round 1 methods: stories of change in social connectedness

We focused the first round of data collection on gathering stories of change from children and parents/caregivers about children's social connectedness. Starting with these more open-ended stories of change meant that in the case study round (Round 2) we could further substantiate or deepen interesting findings or explore gaps not covered by the stories. We purposefully made the evaluation question on social connectedness more exploratory to learn about the context and living condition of children from child and parent/caregiver perspective, including about other explanatory factors that contribute to this outcome. Using stories gives the participant the opportunity to tell the researchers what is important to them, rather than being guided by the questions designed by the researcher.

All data collection was completed by a team of data collectors, which included the TeamUp MEAL team and 6 female data collectors with a refugee background who were also TeamUp facilitators and amongst them spoke the most common languages in the AZCs. The data collection team was trained by the IDS evaluation team in the data collection methods and received ongoing support from IDS during the data collection, including a reflection session at the end of each data collection day.

Children's stories

We collected stories from 46 children in four AZCs (see demographic information in Table 6). Story collection with children consisted of two steps. First children were asked about who the people are that are important in their lives by 1) drawing these people, 2) drawing a network map of people in their lives; or 3) Using the metaphor of a flower where the petals represent people they turn to for support and/or to play with, with size representing the importance of the people. We decided to give children the option of how to draw this so that they could best represent their social connections in a way that was most comfortable for them. Following the drawing, the child was invited to start telling their story about how they connect with people in their current AZC, starting from recollecting what their first day was like and chronologically sharing their experiences to date. The data collectors used follow up prompts to encourage the participant to go deeper into their story. See Annex A2 for prompts used in this evaluation. Story collection was done in the child's preferred language and their preferred location (e.g. in a central room in the AZC, in their own room, outside).

Table 6 Demographics of children participating in story collection

	N of children
Age	
6-10	28
11-18	19
Gender	
Boy	26
Girl	21
Location	
CS1	13
CS2	14
CS3	10
CS4	10
Language	
Arabic	37
Turkish	3
Spanish	3
Kurdish	3
Dutch	1

Source: Authors' own

Next, we invited the same children to read stories from children collected from other AZCs. They were reading stories from other AZCs to ensure the confidentiality of the storytellers. After reading the stories they were invited to share their reflections on what they thought the most important part of the story was and to explain why they thought that was the most important part of the story.

Most significant change with parents/caregivers

In the four main case study sites, we invited parents and caregivers of children who participated in TeamUp into an adapted Most Significant Change (MSC) process to explore their views on the changes they have observed in their child(ren) since their participation in TeamUp/arrival in the AZC. Parents and caregivers were asked to provide a list of changes they have observed in their children since they started participating in TeamUp/arrived in the AZC and were then invited to tell a more detailed story of this change. This story consisted of a description of the situation before the change (beginning), a description of what happened (the middle) and the situation after (the ending). They were also asked to indicate why this change is important to them, whether they see this as a positive or a negative change, and if and how they think TeamUp contributed to this change. These stories were collected in the parents/caregivers' preferred language, using a template (see Annex A2.2). We collected a total of 75 stories from parents and caregivers, see Table 7 for the demographics.

Table 7 Demographics of parents and caregivers in most significant change

	N of stories [^]
Gender*	
Man	13
Woman	35
Other	2
Location	
Location 3	15
Location 1	18
Location 6	11
Location 4	7
Location 2	14
Location 5	11
Language	
Arabic	48
Turkish	7
Spanish	15
Kurdish	8
Dutch	0
Farsi	2
[^] some parents/caregivers told multiple stories if they had more than one child in TeamUp * Not all data on gender of parents/caregivers was completely collected	

Source: Authors' own

In each location, parents and caregivers were invited to join a participatory analysis workshop where they were presented with a list of changes that was extracted from the stories of a different location by the full evaluation team⁴. They were then asked to rank the 3 changes they perceive as most important for children in asylum centres and their reasoning. Following the ranking, the parents caregivers read a selection of the stories from which these changes were extracted and were invited to share any further reflections on the role of TeamUp as well as anything they felt was important to highlight.

We, as the evaluation team, then undertook a causal analysis of the parents and caregivers' stories starting from the way in which they described changes that relate to social connectedness and mapping the causal pathways based on the data.

2.2.2 Round 2 methods: case studies and participatory research

In the four locations we used a combination of methods to collect data on the children's embodied sensations, feelings and emotions before and after the session, their experiences with the TeamUp sessions and connecting with other children. We also undertook interviews with TeamUp facilitators to understand their perceptions on the impact of TeamUp on children and with COA contact people to further develop our understanding of the context of the AZC and how TeamUp sits within this broader ecosystem.

⁴ This was done to ensure anonymity.

Body mapping

We undertook body mapping with the children to gather evidence on how participating in TeamUp session impacts on how children feel inside their bodies, including safety. To understand how children were feeling before and after they participated in the TeamUp sessions, we asked them to do a body mapping exercise before and after the session. Asking them to first draw the sensations and emotions they feel in their body, before verbalizing them, allowed the children to stay closer to their feelings without having to process them and make sense of them, which happens once we start verbalizing our emotion.

The body mapping started with playing meditation music and facilitating a short meditation that consisted of taking three deep breaths in and out and paying attention to different body parts by placing our hands on them. Once the meditation was completed, children were provided with a template that had the drawing of a human figure on it and a selection of symbols that represented different facial expressions to represent emotions (e.g. anger, fear, sadness, happiness) as well as other sensations that they may have (e.g. feeling confused, love, warmth, stormy, prickly) (see Annex A2.5). Some symbols were explained to the children, but mostly they were left open so the children were able to use their own interpretation and how they might want to use them. Children were asked to draw what emotions and sensations they were feeling in their body on the map. Children either did this by drawing lines from the symbols to the body parts or by drawing the symbols onto the different body parts. After the second body map (completed after the TeamUp session), children were asked by the data collectors what they had drawn, why they had drawn that, whether that was different from what they had drawn before the session and why they thought it was or was not different. This was completed in their own preferred language. 43 body maps were completed with children 10 years and older in 5 sessions across four case study locations.

Participatory research journey with children

We undertook a participatory research journey with children in the four main locations, where children were provided with a research booklet that they could use to undertake their own research. The journey took place over a period of three to four weeks and consisted of three elements: 1) Introductory session in which the evaluation team and the children met, explained the purpose of the participatory research and children completed the first couple of pages of their research booklet; 2) 2-weeks of children doing their own research using their booklet; 3) reflection session in which the children's booklets and own research were used as a starting point, to understand their experiences with TeamUp, embodiment and developing social awareness. We provided each child with their own research booklet that was a combination of questions specifically about TeamUp and their friends, a couple of pages they could use to write or draw any reflections on the TeamUp sessions they attended and blank pages they could use for their own research. In the introductory session the evaluation team and the data collectors worked through the first couple of pages with specific questions about children's experiences with TeamUp. Before the second session, a check-in was organized at each location to see whether the children had started writing in the booklet and to support with any questions they had.

We undertook the reflection sessions one-on-one or in groups from 2 – 8 children. Children were grouped into language and/or friend groups, which sometimes meant there was only one child speaking a specific language. We first asked them what they had done in their booklets. This meant that they could start the reflection based on what they wanted to share about TeamUp or anything else that was the topic of their research. These conversations were then followed by other questions about what children saw as the added value of TeamUp. Conversations were led by Mieke, and one of

the data collectors translated and also asked questions where they saw interesting opportunities for deepening the conversation.

Interviews with TeamUp facilitators and COA

In the four main case study locations we undertook interviews with 3 facilitators in each location. Interviews with facilitators were realist-inspired semi-structured (Manzano, 2016). They were realist inspired in the sense that we did not use a teacher-learner cycle, but we did directly ask the facilitator about their observations regarding our theory on children embodying their emotions in TeamUp sessions and whether this helps them to connect with their peers in the session (see interview schedule in A2.3). This approach was chosen because we thought the facilitators would have good insights into these two programme theories. These interviews covered their experience being a TeamUp facilitator, asked about what changes facilitators saw in the children during the sessions and over a longer period of time. We also asked about contextual safety and how safe children feel within the session. Facilitators had been facilitators for between 3 months and 4 years. In each location there was at least 1 interviewed facilitator who had a refugee background themselves.

We only interviewed COA contact people in Location 1 and Location 2. In location 4 the COA contact person did not think she would be able to provide useful information and in Location 3 we did not get a response from COA within the timeframe of the evaluation. These semi-structured interviews mainly aimed to get further information about the context of the AZC, including how TeamUp fits within the broader AZC ecosystem in terms of other activities, referral function and relationship between COA and TeamUp. They were also asked about changes they are observing in the children and what benefits they see in TeamUp.

2.3 The need for methodological reflexivity

As described already in relation to the steps of the CA cycle, the approach taken has been intentionally and deeply collaborative. Indeed, the iterative nature of the CA approach calls for flexibility in the evaluation team to co-design as we iterate between the steps. This collaborative approach has led to refinement of the focus, design and the contextualisation and operationalisation of the design in the field. A shared value that was made explicit from the outset is the inclusion of the perspectives of participating children, their parents/caregivers, the facilitation team and COA throughout. In the challenging conditions of the AZC, with participants who often have little control over many aspects of their lives, pragmatic operational challenges often drove necessary methodological adaptations, to minimise any burden on them, and to aim to move towards some level of co-ownership of the evaluation.

The iterative collaborative approach and the need to work in ways that are fit-for-context, led to several adaptations of the methodology as described in Table 8.

Table 8 Adaptations made to the design and methods

Adaptation made	Rationale
Data collection	
Reduction of methods used, including taking out facilitator observations and interviews with children	We undertook a quality assessment of our methods using our quality of evidence rubrics (see section 2.1) and assessed how each of the initially planned methods would contribute evidence on uniqueness and plausibility of the causal claims, the representativeness and triangulation (see Annex A1 for overview). Based on this we concluded that facilitator observations would not add more on top of interviews

	with the facilitators and that children's interviews would not increase representativeness nor give enough extra strengths on the other evidence rubrics to warrant this extra data gathering from children.
Most Significant Change (MSC) time framing question to parents and caregivers changed from 'since your child joined TeamUp' to 'since you moved into this AZC'	Data collectors noticed after Day 1 of data collection that many parents and caregivers do not know what TeamUp is and the majority of children in TeamUp join nearly as soon as they arrive in the AZC
Prioritise story collection from children 8 years and older (excluding 6 to 7 year olds)	After the first day of child story collection, it was noticed that the children younger than 8 years old were only giving very short answers and were not able to share their stories of social connectedness in the AZC
Adapted questions in the MSC template to include more examples and prompts that the data collectors can use to make clear to the parents and caregivers what kind of changes they can think about	For some parents/caregivers the terms 'most important' or 'significant' were hard to understand or hard to identify what would be most important for them.
Reduced number of child story collection locations from 6 to 4	Due to time constraints and the richness of the stories collected from the 4 locations it was decided that 4 locations would provide us with sufficient information
Reduced the number of main case study locations from 6 to 4 for Round 2	Due to logistic and financial challenges related to the number of visits required to organise we decided that it would be more feasible to undertake Round 2 data collection in 4 rather than 6 main locations. The main locations chosen were based on pragmatic decisions related to ease of travel for data collectors to each location, whilst maintaining a good spread across different types of AZC locations
Data analysis	
Evaluation team extracted the changes from the MSC stories and during the workshop placed them on the wall for parents and caregivers to discuss and rank after which the parents and caregivers then read the stories describing these changes.	Because most stories had more than one change and parents/caregivers reading through the stories took a long time in the first session and parents/caregivers had limited time, interest and motivation to participate in a long workshop (>1 hour)
Children's life story analysis was limited to children identifying what they think is the most important message/insight/information from the story that they would select to tell other people and why.	Undertaking causal analysis on the story was decided to be not possible because (1) most stories were too short and not causal enough to undertake the analysis; (2) time restrictions meant that we could only work with the children 1 – 2 hours; (3) keeping the children engaged for more than that would be hard.

Source: Authors' own

2.4 Agreeing criteria to assess quality of evidence

As part of the inception workshop, where the purpose, scope and approach were agreed between the external evaluation team and the TeamUp commissioning team, we made explicit the criteria that would allow us to collectively assess the quality of the evidence being generated through the

evaluation. We explored a number of quality criteria⁵ based on current best practice within similar evaluation approaches and agreed on four criteria:

- **Plausibility** – focusing on the overall coherence and strength of the contribution claim and the narrative developed about how the intervention leads to outcomes;
- **Representativeness** – focusing on the extent to which the voices of those targeted by and involved in the intervention are central in the evidence produced through the evaluation;
- **Triangulation** – focusing on the way in which multiple lines and sources of evidence inform causal claims made;
- **Uniqueness** – focusing on the strength of explanation around specifically how the intervention within particular contexts contributes to outcomes. This rubric was updated after the first round to better reflect how our evaluation prioritised understanding of how TeamUp works within a broad causal package.

For each of these agreed criteria we then developed a set of rubrics to be used internally by the evaluation team to make transparent how we view the strength of evidence presented (see Annex A1).

⁵ Based on work of Tom Aston and Marina Apgar: <https://www.evaluation.org.uk/2023/12/quality-of-evidence-rubrics-available/>

3. Findings

This section of the report details the findings of both round 1 and round 2 data collection. It starts with the findings organised by the four case study locations synthesizing across data and analysis implemented via the body mapping, participatory research with the children, interviews with facilitators and COA and MSC stories with parents and caregivers. The findings are organised in relationship to the three causal hotspots. The second part of this section zooms in to how children in AZCs develop social connectedness and combines findings from the children's stories and the parents and caregivers' MSC stories.

3.1 Main case study findings on embodiment, social awareness and social connectedness

3.1.1 Location 1

This is a large AZC with space for 1,000 refugees. The AZC is housed in an old prison. This AZC is relatively safe, due to a hardline approach by the mayor on the need for the AZC to not cause problems for the town around it, meaning that no refugees with a record of disruptive behaviour in other AZCs are placed here. This AZC has a relatively high percentage of LGBTQ+ residents and extra programmes provided here to encourage inclusivity. Other programmes that are provided for children are more ad hoc and include interns doing activities, theatre visits, clowning workshops etc. Table 9 provides additional detail on contextual factors for this AZC that we found to be relevant in relation to embodiment, social awareness and social connectedness.

Table 9 Additional contextual information in Location 1

Level	Description
Individual	All teenagers are aged between 10 and 15. Four girls and the rest of the group are boys. The majority are Arabic speaking, with some Spanish speaking and Turkish speaking children joining.
Group context	Relatively stable core group of children overall, but in the weeks of Round 2 data collection, two new children had just arrived that disrupted the stability of the group. This group has been slowly growing and has about 18 to 23 children attending each week.
Facilitators	Recent turnover of facilitators. One facilitator speaks Arabic, one speaks limited Dutch, one paid facilitator ⁶ has just begun.
Relational context	TeamUp and COA have a longstanding relationship over 8 years and TeamUp often does trainings in this location
Institutional context	Relatively safe location, with a focus on inclusivity of LGBTQI TeamUp is the main programme for children and perceived by COA as the 'professional children's activity' because it is so regular and facilitators are well trained. There are other, less regular activities, such as social work interns who run activities, theatre visits, clowning workshops, trips to funfairs, Christmas and Sinterklaas activities.

Source: Authors' own

What children experience in their bodies after the TeamUp session

The body mapping data confirmed that the teenagers in this group were experiencing a variety of emotions and sensations in their bodies after the TeamUp session and were simultaneously holding

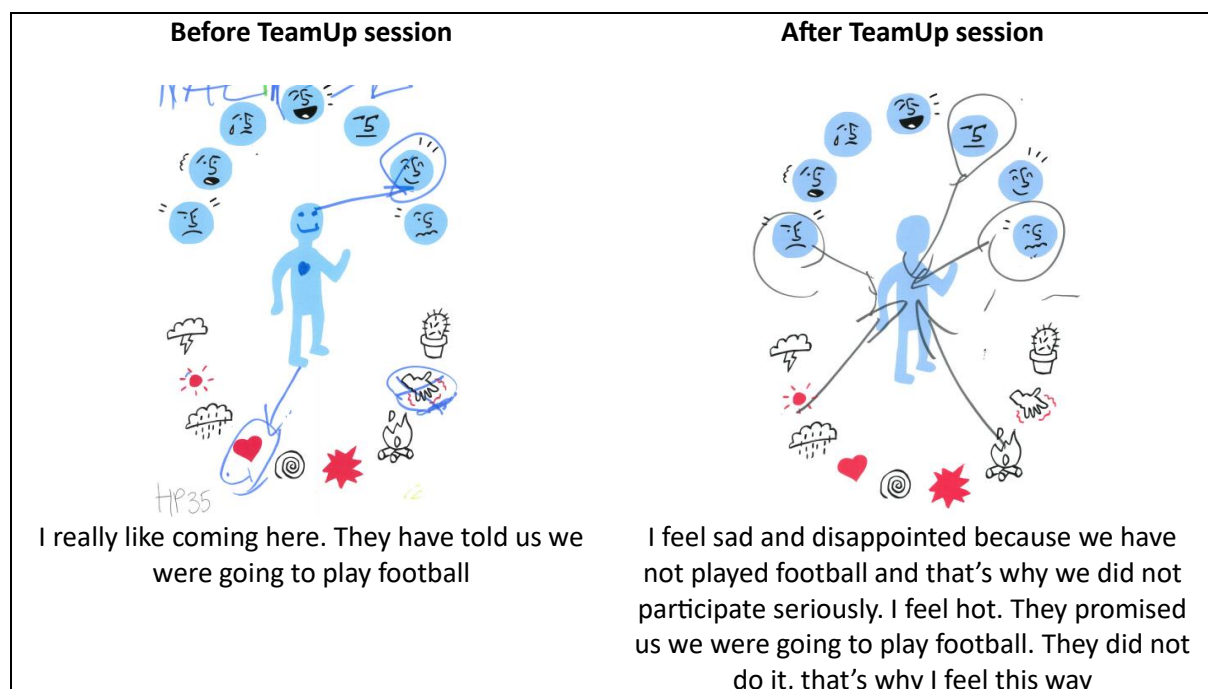
⁶ TeamUp has begun a pilot of paid facilitators in some locations, we did not seek to include pilot sites in our case selection and it is out of scope for the evaluation to provide comparative findings in relationship to this pilot.

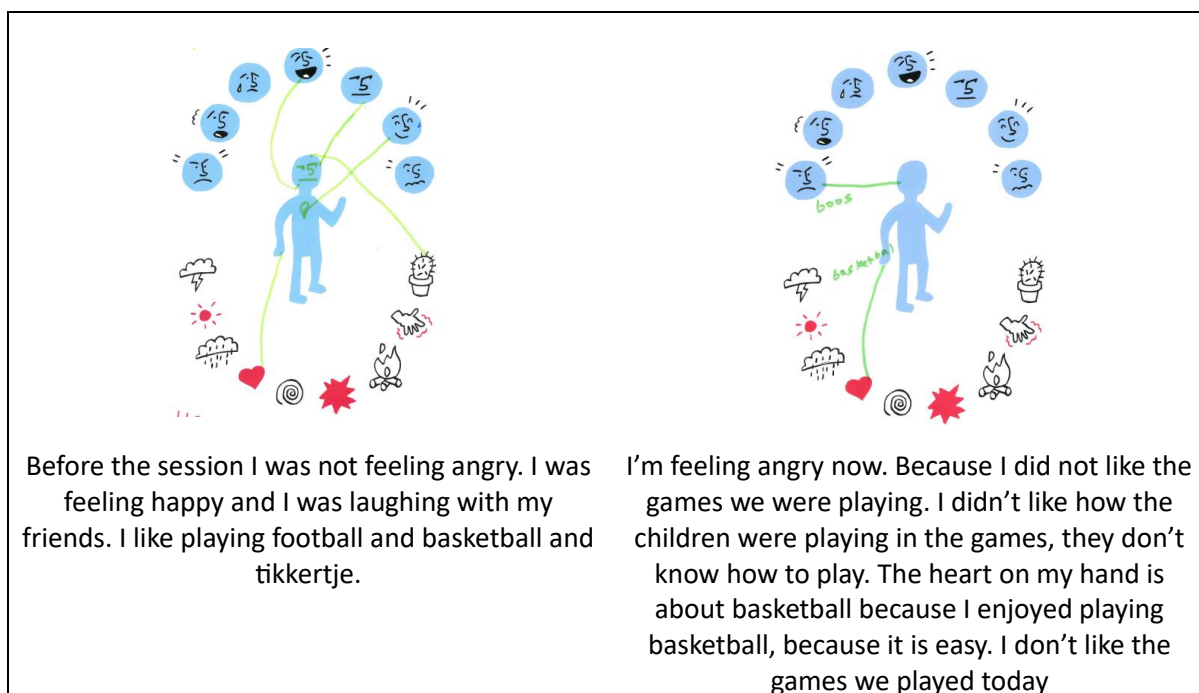
positive and negative emotions. Many teenagers experienced a change from feeling happy before the session to feeling angry and frustrated after the session. Some of the boys were feeling annoyed because the facilitators promised that they were going to be playing football this week (which they had been looking forward to), but this did not happen (see Figure 3). One of the boys explained that he was feeling sad and disappointed and therefore did not participate seriously in the rest of the games. This affected the other children, because the girls were expressing that after the session, they were feeling angry because they did not like the games that were being played and also not how the other children were playing the games. Similarly, for one of the boys he was feeling irritated all over his body because one of the other boys was cheating in the game. One of the girls illustrated that she was feeling angry because she does not like going to TeamUp and does not like the games that are being played in TeamUp, but she goes because her friends want her to join:

“I’m feeling angry because of the games we were playing in TeamUp, I don’t like playing these games. The other children are not playing nice and I don’t like playing with them. I like playing football and tag (tikkertje) and rope jumping (en touwtje springen). I don’t like going to TeamUp, but I go to TeamUp because my friends are telling me to come with them. If I don’t go to TeamUp they will get sad.” (11-year-old Syrian girl)

The body mapping further showed that even though some of the children were frustrated at the games that were played and how the other children were playing, they were still happy to be there and had fun playing with their friends. One Colombian girl found that she was feeling tension in her body because of the way other children were playing, but then the tension disappeared because she had played and ended up having fun with other children.

Figure 3 What children in Location 1 experience in their body before and after the TeamUp session





Source: Authors' own

This group was very stable until November, after which two new children joined who displayed quite disruptive behaviour in the session. Children are affected by how other children behave in the session; for example when they don't listen, use swear words or speak in their own language, this reduces their enjoyment of the session. From the participatory research we found that several teenagers in this group have a desire for the facilitators to be stricter on dealing with children who disrupt the session by enforcing the TeamUp rules, playing games that they are asking for and not to treat them like little children. And for the facilitators to communicate more clearly on the rules and games. Facilitators commented that it is hard for them to implement and enforce the TeamUp structure with such a big group of children (18-23 children regularly come) and when there are only 2 or 3 facilitators, they need at least 4 facilitators to be able to manage the group. Not being able to implement the structure leads to children not knowing what to expect from the session, and the body mapping data shows that when expectations are not met, the children can experience negative emotions.

According to the facilitators, having a facilitator who speaks the same language as the children is helpful to explain rules and games and to control some of the children, but can also lead to being a distraction and take extra time when games are explained verbally in multiple languages. The teenagers reflected that when the Arabic speaking facilitator is not around, the children swear more. Despite not always liking each session and finding things that they get annoyed about, the teenagers still come every time, enter the session with a lot of enthusiasm and have fun playing games, doing sports and see it as a good distraction from being bored in the centre and have a good time with friends.

Creating social awareness through TeamUp

We found a strong sense of increased social awareness in children in this location, especially in relation to learning about and respecting other children's cultural backgrounds. Parents and caregivers in this location ranked 'becoming more tolerant of other children's cultures', 'friends from other cultures' and 'communicates more with children from other cultures' as the most important changes that they observe in the children. Children themselves identify that the biggest benefit of TeamUp is that they get to play with other children they do not normally play with. This allows them to 1) make friends,

including with children beyond their cultural groups and 2) learn about other children's cultures. The evidence suggests that TeamUp helps them to make friends, especially for those who find it hard to make friends.

"It's fun. Otherwise when we are by ourselves if we're not with so many children it's not as fun. Or the game like tikkie finishes very quickly. For example with three people, after each person's turn it's finished very quickly. So it is better with more people". (11-year-old Venezuelan boy)

"...to play sports, and make friends, everything. I also use it to make friends. But I cannot make friends easily. Sometimes children play outside and not in the hallway and I don't go. When I go to TeamUp I play with everyone. For me it is difficult to make friends. (15-year-old Turkish girl)

Facilitators, COA, parents/caregivers and children all commented on increased connection amongst the children from different cultural backgrounds because of TeamUp in this location. In this group there are different friend groups that exist outside of the TeamUp sessions, as children already know each other from being in the centre for a while and through school but they tend to play with children from similar cultural backgrounds, e.g. Latin American, Syrian, Turkish. Within TeamUp, however, the facilitators actively mix the children in the games, which leads to the children playing with children from different cultures. The children explained that through this they have come to understand that children from other cultures are also nice to play with and that they can play together regardless of their background:

"Children from other cultures are nice and they are very nice to me during TeamUp" (15-year-old Syrian boy)

"We can play together. Even if you come from different cultures, you can still play together. When I came here the first time in TeamUp, I was so afraid because I had never played with children from other cultures. But after that we all went together, talked, played, so then it was fun children from all different cultures and they learn to play with children from other cultures even if they do not speak the same language." (12-year-old Colombian girl).

Especially in the context of asylum centres where there are people from many different cultures, being able to understand other cultural backgrounds and being able to play with each other and respect each other is seen as important for the wellbeing of the children and, we have some evidence that shows that TeamUp makes an important contribution.

"The surrounding is not easy, living together with so many people from different countries in one place. But knowing that they can play, learn to be more tolerant with the other children. And yes, there are children who are more rough. But they get to know each other and respect each other. They have learned now how to live together, through play." (Colombian mother)

They also learn about each other's cultures and languages through TeamUp. For example, some of the Latin American children commented that the Arabic children do not eat pork meat and also that the boys do not want or are not allowed to play with girls, whereas they play with everyone regardless of their gender.

Social connectedness development through TeamUp

In this location there seems to be less contribution from TeamUp to children's social connectedness. For four parents/caregivers in this location, their child making friends with other children in the AZC (including from other cultures) was the most significant change they observed, within which TeamUp played a contributing factor together with school.

Five parents/caregivers, however, told stories of their child becoming more socially withdrawn, illustrating a diversity of both positive and negative changes. A recurring theme in the parents/caregivers' stories of children becoming socially withdrawn, especially Latin American parents/caregivers, was the challenge of not being part of the dominant Arabic culture in the centre, which leads to a culture shock at arrival. Some of these children do not go to TeamUp, other do go to TeamUp but mainly to exercise, interact with the facilitator or only play with their existing friends. For an 11-year-old Syrian girl, who doesn't like TeamUp and only goes to it because her friends want her to come, TeamUp together with school have allowed her to make connections with others and make friends in the AZC:

"TeamUp has played a role in these changes, but not just that. School and other factors also contribute to her changes." (Mother of 11-year-old Syrian girl)

TeamUp can help with addressing the culture shock that parents/caregivers and children experience, as described above that TeamUp increases social and cultural awareness amongst children. This is illustrated by one Colombian parent/ caregivers's story of their 8-year-old daughter who by joining TeamUp was able to learn more Dutch, which allowed her to express herself more and consequently to communicate with other children who also speak Dutch and therefore was able to interact more with other children in TeamUp. Through these interactions in TeamUp she was able to make connections and friends within the AZC.

Jorge: a 13-year-old Venezuelan boy living in Location 1, who has been in the Netherlands for 5 months.

Jorge usually goes to TeamUp with his friends, who are also from Latin-America. Playing in TeamUp tires him out, but also energises him because of the games they play. He prefers playing in TeamUp than outside of TeamUp, because they get to play with more children and can therefore do other games. The children are also better behaved when they play in TeamUp than outside of TeamUp, even though he gets annoyed at the other children playing rough and swearing a lot. He learnt about other children's culture because of TeamUp. When they play the same games every week, he gets bored in TeamUp. His mother sometimes pushes him to go to TeamUp, especially when he has been at home a lot on his iPad.

His mother reflects that he has become more mature and independent since moving to this AZC. She thinks this is because he has learnt to adapt well to new situations because over the many years of their refugee journey, they had to change environment many times. She is not too strict for him or other children, because it is also hard enough for the children.

3.1.2 Location 2

This is a large AZC with space for 1,000 refugees. The AZC is housed in what used to be an office building and sits within an office park. It is easily accessible by bus from the train station or town centre. There is outdoor space where children can play, but there is no playground or dedicated play area for the children. This location was rated as children being and feeling less safe according to the regional coordinators. Table 10 provides additional contextual information that was gathered in the data collection.

Table 10 Additional contextual information Location 2

Level	Description
Individual	Children aged 10 to 12, with equal numbers of boys and girls. Most are from Arabic or Kurdish backgrounds.
Group context	This location has two groups, we only worked with the older group of 10-12 year olds. However, as some of the younger children are friends with children in the older group, they want to play in the older age group. There is one boy who has been displaying disruptive behaviour during the period of data collection. This location used to have three groups, but the older group (13-17 year-olds) started with a pilot with 'sports carousel' ⁷ .
Facilitators	There are a total of seven active facilitators in this location, three of whom have been here for more than a year. One of the facilitators lives in the AZC herself. Between them, they speak all the languages of the children.
Relational context	TeamUp and COA have a good relationship. There is some fear towards COA amongst the children because of their authority and connection with relocation. COA appreciates TeamUp as a 'third eye' that can observe and refer when things are hard with children.
Institutional context	There is not a lot of outdoor space. Violence and conflict are more common in this centre and people feel unsafe. A couple of weeks before Round 2 data collection there was a stabbing in this location. COA is very open to activities for the children, there are more one-off activities organised and TeamUp is the only regular activity.

Source: Authors' own

What children experienced in their bodies after the TeamUp session

Through the body mapping, girls all reported getting angry and annoyed after the session because of one boy who had been displaying disruptive behaviour. The boy was fighting with others in this session and in previous sessions. One of the girls was already feeling annoyed before the session started. One of the boys identified that while he felt happy before the session (because he was going to go to TeamUp), he still felt happy after the session, but also felt different because of other children misbehaving in the session. In their participatory research journey, the children shared drawings of this boy misbehaving in previous sessions. The boy who was the one who was misbehaving felt happy and nervous before the session and after the session he was unsure about how he felt. In particular, he reflected that when he is angry, he becomes hot and he does not know why that is (Figure 4). The facilitators mentioned that they do not always know how to handle what they perceive as expressions of trauma well.

"Some colleagues have never worked with children and do not know how trauma works. How can you then deal with a child to help them feel safe again. I think that's missing" – (Facilitator, Location 2)

However, they found that they do see a reduction in explosive behaviour and increase in calmness when they are able to implement the structure of TeamUp well (using the themes to design the session, enforce the rules, using routines), give positive attention to the children and explain to the children what is happening when the child is experiencing difficult emotions and is sitting in timeout. The latter is often possible because the facilitators here speak the same language as the children. Facilitators and COA shared that they always give unconditional positive regard to the children, which contributes to the children's positive emotions. However, ongoing acceptance of children who display disruptive behaviour into the session can be detrimental for other children's attendance and benefits

⁷ Sports Carousel is a spin-off of TeamUp where children play different sports at sports clubs outside of the AZC

from the session as our data shows that disruptive behaviour of other children can reduce the safety of the session and make other children angry or annoyed.

Other children expressed sensations of feeling hot, feeling energised and feeling happy because they had exercised and played with other children, especially with their friends. In the participatory research, children also shared that they experience positive emotions following TeamUp. They described it as fun, and that it gives them energy and makes them feel happy, which is the same feeling they have when they play with their friends:

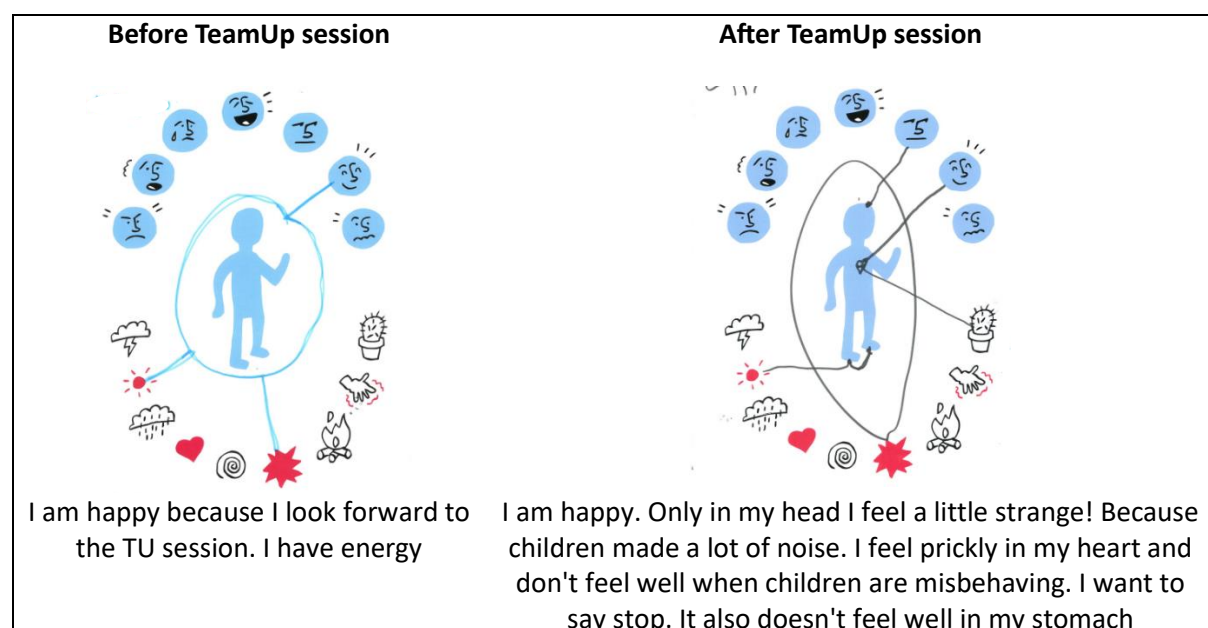
"I get positive energy because of TeamUp, I also feel that when I'm with my friends" (11-year-old girl)

Parents and caregivers in this location also mentioned in their MSC stories that their return home happy after a TeamUp session. In their participatory research journey the children also highlighted that they find it both fun and also not fun:

"I like TeamUp a lot, I play with my friends there. Sometimes there are arguments and sometimes it is not fun. So that is why I chose the name adventure." (11-year-old Arabic girl)

"In TeamUp we come play games here and then we can do everything. I can be myself. And nobody tells me what I need to do. Everything is possible. Only sometimes children get into arguments." (10-year-old Kurdish girl).

Figure 4 Location 2 pre and post bodymaps





"I am happy and I am nervous"



"I don't know what I feel. I am happy in my heart because I had a good sleep. When I get angry I become like the fire. I don't know why that is"



I was annoyed, I don't know why, but I wasn't happy as always. I did a heart because I love my friends.



I was angry i had a headache i still love my friends that joins team up with me and when we were done i was sleepy and bored and angry not happy at all , all because of K whenever I finish team up I'm happy after teamup but because of K today I wasn't happy



I felt fire in the belly after and not before because I'm feeling more energy after TeamUp. This is because exercise gives you energy. Other children don't give me energy, but playing with other children gives me energy. (10-year-old Pakistani boy)

Source: Authors' own

Creating social awareness through TeamUp

In this location the evidence of the contribution of TeamUp to social awareness is mixed. In their participatory research journey, some children reported that they have not learnt anything in TeamUp

while others reported learning how children respond to winning and losing - they get upset when they lose, and they like it when they win. Facilitators mentioned that they explicitly use themes and play games that have winners and losers so that the children learn that it is okay to lose a game. Children also reported learning how to help each other, how to play together and to be polite with other children. Only a couple of children in this location mentioned that they learnt about other children's cultures.

Parents and caregivers talked about how their child had become more aggressive since moving to this AZC. For example they had learnt swear words from other children in the AZC. A strong street culture exist here, because this is a large AZC with many people from different countries living together who do not speak the same languages and where there is a lack of privacy. Becoming part of this street culture can become a survival strategy.

"he learned bad words from other people especially from the children who are older than him. He defends himself in way that if someone beat him, he fights back , and if someone insult him he insults the person back." (Syrian mother of 8-year-old boy).

Social connectedness development through TeamUp

In the context of this AZC, where there is less safety, there are less opportunities for children to meet with other children because (1) there are less spaces to play outside and (2) some parents/caregivers of children do not allow their children to play outside. Here TeamUp is an important place where children can play with other children in a safe environment. We found evidence from the participatory research journey that for many children (especially those who are not allowed to play outside) TeamUp is the only activity that they engage in and is therefore essential for their social connectedness to develop:

"If TeamUp were not there then everyone would be on their phones. And then I would not have friends. My mother says I am not allowed to play with my friends if their parents don't allow them. Sometimes they can only play in front of the door. They are not allowed to run and go outside like me. But they are allowed to go to TeamUp, because the mother says that the children play well there. If the mother is not home they can also not come." (10-year-old Kurdish girl)

"I see them only in TeamUp, otherwise I don't see these friends because I don't go out. Some friends don't play outside their room only in TeamUp... I have only that day to play. I am waiting for it from Monday. I am looking forward for it. If there is no TU, there will be no activities to do and to play. It is my only activity." (13-year-old Syrian girl)

Some children, however, can connect with children in other places such as school and playing football. They reported meeting their friends in school initially and friendships further developing when they were together in TeamUp. Therefore, some children believe that even if TeamUp wasn't there they would still be able to make friends in school. Parents/caregivers (of children 10 years and younger) also describe that their children are bored in the centre and have a need to play and get out of their rooms. The children see many other children in the centre, and they find creative ways to interact and play with each other, through football, using gestures or translation apps which helps them to make connections and make friends.

Children explicitly mention the role of the facilitators and their language abilities, highlighting in particular that because the facilitators speak their language children behave better overall, and they themselves feel safe in the session. Parents and caregivers also find having an adult around to play

with their children an important factor that means they are comfortable sending their children to TeamUp because they know they will be safe in the session:

"During TeamUp things go well because there is an adult around, but it is mostly outside the session that things happen between the children...One can say that the system that children are being entertained by an organization is good because they teach them to integrate and be nicer to each other. And to share without attacking each other verbally or physically."
(Colombian father).

In this AZC where children are and feel less safe, the findings from the parents and caregivers' MSC and facilitator interviews suggest there is an extra role of support the TeamUp facilitators play, both for the children and for COA. Three out of the seven facilitators have been here for longer than a year, some speak the same language as the children and because of that have been able to build relationships of trust with the children. Facilitators reflect that they always give positive attention to the children, making the children feel seen and safe and therefore they talk with the facilitators about what is going on for them.

COA also mentioned that for them having TeamUp facilitators is helpful as a 'third eye'. By this they mean that the facilitators refer children who show psychological distress or indications of abuse to them and providing information about relationships and challenges between children in the centre. However, the facilitators expressed some uncertainty about this role, because the children are also afraid of COA because of their authority status and are unsure of what the consequences are for the children's sense of safety in the session if they become aware of the facilitators talking with COA.

Nesma: a 11-year-old girl living in Location 2, who has been in the Netherlands for 18 months.

Nesma's participatory research journey was titled 'adventure', and the adventure was fun. TeamUp helped Nesma to become friends with Sara. She met Sara initially in school, when they saw each other in TeamUp, they were happy that they already knew each other and became friends. In the TeamUp sessions she is learning that some of her friends cry easily and others get angry when they lose a game. In her research booklet she drew some images of past TeamUp sessions, one where she was happy because she won at musical chairs. In the other she had drawn angry children, because of one boy who had picked a fight with her friend Sara and Sara had thrown water over the boy to make him stop.

She used to enjoy TeamUp more and go every Monday, but her friends do not like it as much, therefore she also goes less. She sometimes knocks on her friend's door to try to get them to come, but they don't come. She gets bullied by others for stuttering and she had a fight with one of her friends. Therefore she does not like to play outside of her room that much anymore.

3.1.3 Location 3

This is an emergency location that primarily provides space for families. There is space for 350 residents who are meant to live there temporarily. It is housed in a disused office building and is in the middle of the city. There is no outdoor space that is part of the AZC and no playground and generally limited space to play for the children. Table 11 provides additional contextual information.

Table 11 Additional contextual information Location 3

Level	Description
Individual	Children here are between 6- and 19-years-old. There seems to be an equal split between boys and girls. Most children are from Arabic speaking backgrounds, with some from Turkey and Pakistan.
Group context	This location recently split one large group aged 6-11 into two smaller groups, one for younger children (6 to 9-year-olds) and for older children (10 to 13-year-olds), because the group was too big and with too big age differences. Splitting the groups should make the activities more relevant to age. Given people stay in this AZC for longer compared to other AZCs, the group is relatively stable over a longer period of time. There have been some children displaying disruptive behaviour in this group.
Facilitators	Overall, it is a relatively stable team of facilitators who work well together.
Relational context*	
Institutional context	Given the AZC is in a former office building on an industrial estate, there is no outdoor space. Indoor spaces where children can play is limited to one communal area. There are no other activities offered aside from TeamUp. Children seem to feel relatively safe here.
* We did not interview COA here	

Source: Authors' own

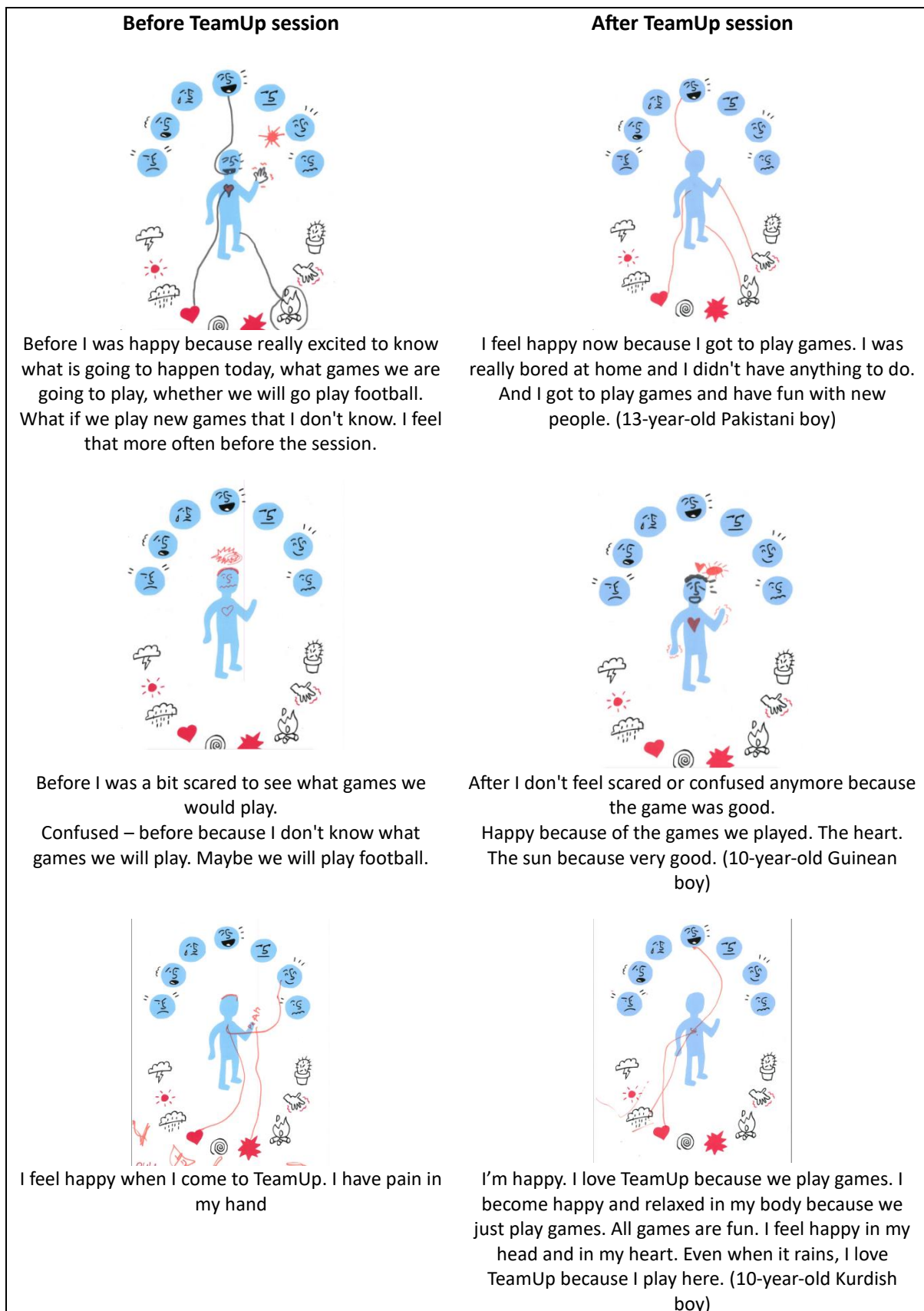
What children experience in their bodies after the TeamUp session

The body mapping data confirmed that most participants expressed sensations of feeling relaxed in their body and feeling happy after the TeamUp session. They reported feeling happy because they played with their friends and because they enjoyed the games. Before the session, two of the boys expressed feelings of anticipation and nervousness because they did not know which games they were going to play. After the session they felt happy because they had enjoyed the games. Children expressed feeling warm because they exercised.

Facilitators also reflected on changes in children's emotions before and after the session. They noted that children often come into the session with a lot of energy and calm down during the session. They see changes from children being angry at the start of the session to becoming happier. Facilitators also described that emotions fluctuate over the duration of the session, children can get frustrated during the session when they do not get to play the games they would like to play, or when they lose. Sometimes this leads to the child leaving the session and not returning. Sometimes the children use the timeout zone and when the facilitator takes the time to talk with the child in timeout and explains what is happening, it helps the child to regulate their emotions and they become able to re-join the session. Yet other children leave the room, cool off and come back on their own.

Changes in the children's feelings and emotions also happens over time. Facilitators gave an example of a girl who was displaying very disruptive behaviour when she just joined TeamUp and who became quieter and calmer over time. The facilitators highlight that there may have also been other factors at play that they are aware of (e.g. therapy). In their experience, when they explained about the purpose of TeamUp of it being about playing with other children and learning how to cope with emotions, the girl then played with other children in the session, and through positive reinforcement, she understood the purpose of TeamUp and ultimately became calmer and quieter in the TeamUp sessions.

Figure 5 Children's body maps of sensations, feelings and emotions before and after TeamUp session in Location 3



Source: Authors' own

Creating social awareness through TeamUp

The findings from the children's participatory research suggest that children in this location have learnt social awareness and relationship skills through the TeamUp sessions. These skills include learning how to listen to each other; playing with other children; not fighting with each other; not being disrespectful; dealing with losing.

"I learnt from other children in TeamUp to listen to each other" (9-year-old Kurdish girl)

"Learnt not to fight with people and be friends with everyone" (10-year-old Iraqi boy)

From the participatory research with the children and interviews with the facilitators we found that successful implementation of the TeamUp structure by facilitators is a contributing factor. Facilitators are teaching, repeating and using the rules in the sessions, resulting in children knowing the TeamUp rules. When new children join the session, existing children help explain the rules to the new children. This directly contributes to children learning relationship skills and self-regulation such as helping each other, playing together, not fighting and being friends with everyone. Children also reflect on the rules, making TeamUp a better place to play together with their peers, because the facilitators are enforcing the rules when fights happen between the children. Enforcing the rules helps to break through existing group dynamics and culture in the centre, where there are often conflicts, bullying and fights between children.

"It is different TU from outside, because of the adults in TU, I like to have them there, I think it is good to have them there because they manage the fights. When someone fights, I tell it to the facilitators and the facilitators use the rules to manage the conflict." (10-year-old Guinean boy)

The other TeamUp structure that is contributing to increased social awareness is that they play games in teams with children they do not normally play with. Facilitators in this location use the TeamUp session evaluation form to reflect on the sessions and plan the next session. For example, using the friendship theme, they put the children into collaborative games, where they have a shared goal and play with others. This includes mixing of boys and girls and children from different cultural backgrounds. Children do not always like being mixed in this way. Generally, girls do not like to play with boys because they are rougher and therefore prefer to just play by themselves as a group of girls, rather than in TeamUp. Facilitators feel that explaining to the children why they are being mixed helps children accept this. And, once they are playing together, they forget about their differences, which contributes to them eventually accepting children from other cultures. Facilitators observe children leaving the sessions in mixed groups that have connected during the session. Having this opportunity to play with other children is also valued by the children themselves, especially those who did not have this opportunity in the past, or do not currently have the freedom to play with many other children:

"I get to spend time with them and I really like that I spend time with them because I didn't really grow up in like a free childhood, like going outside with friends and stuff like that, so I don't I'm not really, really connected to people like that. So that's why I like it that we do this every Wednesday." (13-year-old Pakistani boy)

"I like to play with all the children, and in TU that is possible, playing together." (9-year-old Syrian/Kurdish girl)

"We learned from the facilitator of TU, how to love other kids. There are 2 groups, the Somalies and us. The facilitators tell us to play together, trying to make connect with each other, every time we try to love this boys, they always return doing something bad." (9-year-old Syrian girl)

Other factors that influence the ability of some children to connect are religious and other cultural dimensions. Facilitators use strategies like putting ribbons between their hands, rather than holding hands, for example, to make connections possible. Sometimes they get backlash from parents/caregivers about having a mixed group and parents/caregivers threaten to not allow their child to attend. However, the facilitators take the time during mobilisation to explain to the parents/caregivers in their own language why this happens and why this is important also with an eye on integration into Dutch society, and they believe this helps the parents and caregivers understand and consequently they allow their child to participate in TeamUp.

Parents and caregivers from this location also ranked increased empathy (a core component of social awareness) as one of the most significant changes they observed in their children. They further added that children have started accepting and communicating more with children from other cultural backgrounds.

Increased social connectedness through TeamUp.

Given there are not many other ways for children to connect in this AZC, TeamUp fills a gap and provides the children with an opportunity to meet other children and become friends. Many of the children in the participatory research confirmed that they have made friends in TeamUp. The findings show that in particular for children who have been there less time, who find it harder to make friends and who are not playing elsewhere are directly benefiting from TeamUp as a place where they can connect with their peers:

“The way that TU helps us communicate with each other, and they help us to not fight with each other and, like, help each other, not try to compromise and compromise. That's. I really like that. And that really helps me and other hopefully other kids, too” (13-year-old Pakistani boy with a less free upbringing)

“If there would not be TU, the children would not know each other, especially for the new children. TU is important for new children. He knows every child in the camp, so he know children also in the common area.” (11-year-old Turkish boy)

“I like TeamUp, it is the best day of the week... because it is a lot of fun to play. Most of the time I am in my room... In TeamUp I play with Arabic girls, but not outside of TeamUp” (11-year-old Turkish girl)

Illustrating the increase in social connectedness through TeamUp, the facilitators shared a story of two boys who would always fight with each other before and after the sessions. After coming to TeamUp regularly and having the facilitators explain to them the purpose of the sessions (which is to play together with all children) these two boys have improved their relationship. Finally, facilitators also shared that they believe the children feel safe with them and that this leads to the children opening up to them with the problems and challenges they face.

Uri: an 9-year-old Kurdish girl living in Location 3, who has been in the Netherlands for 13 months.

TeamUp is a very important activity for Uri because it is the only activity she participates in the whole week and the only place where she gets to play with other children. Up until recently she was very good friends with two Turkish twin sisters, but they were relocated to another AZC. Now there are no other children in the centre who speak the same language as her. Within TeamUp she plays with the Arabic speaking children. But she does not hang out with them outside of the TeamUp sessions because she can't talk with them, because they don't speak the same language. Uri's mother also says that TeamUp is important because Uri has learnt how to behave in a group and act in different events and activities and how to play with children from different age groups.

3.1.4 Location 4

This is a medium size AZC with space for 740 refugees. The buildings were purpose-build to be an AZC. Between the buildings there is lots of outdoor space and a playground and various sportsgrounds (including football, basketball and volleyball) outside. Aside from TeamUp, here there is also de Vrolijkheid and there is a school in this AZC. Table 12 provides detail on contextual factors relevant for our programme theories that we identified in the data gathered with children and from parents and caregivers, facilitators and COA.

Table 12 Additional contextual information Location 4 based on findings from facilitator and COA interviews and children's participatory research journey

Level	Description
Individual	Children are between 6 and 11 years old. Largely boys, mainly from Arabic speaking backgrounds. Some of the children in this AZC are only allowed to play when TeamUp is there and not at other times.
Group context	This is an unstable group of participants, with different children coming different weeks and the group includes one boy displaying very disruptive behaviour. Existing group dynamics outside of the session are repeated within the session. Large age range leads to mismatches in the group.
Facilitators	The facilitators have been working in this location for a long time and are relatively stable as a group. Recently there have been a few changes, such as new facilitators joining the team. One facilitator who speaks Arabic has recently left the location, others only speak Dutch. Facilitators do not always feel like they have enough tools to tackle difficult behaviours.
Relational context ⁸	
Institutional context	There is a lot of green space and outdoor play area in this location. There is also a school within the AZC.

Source: Authors' own

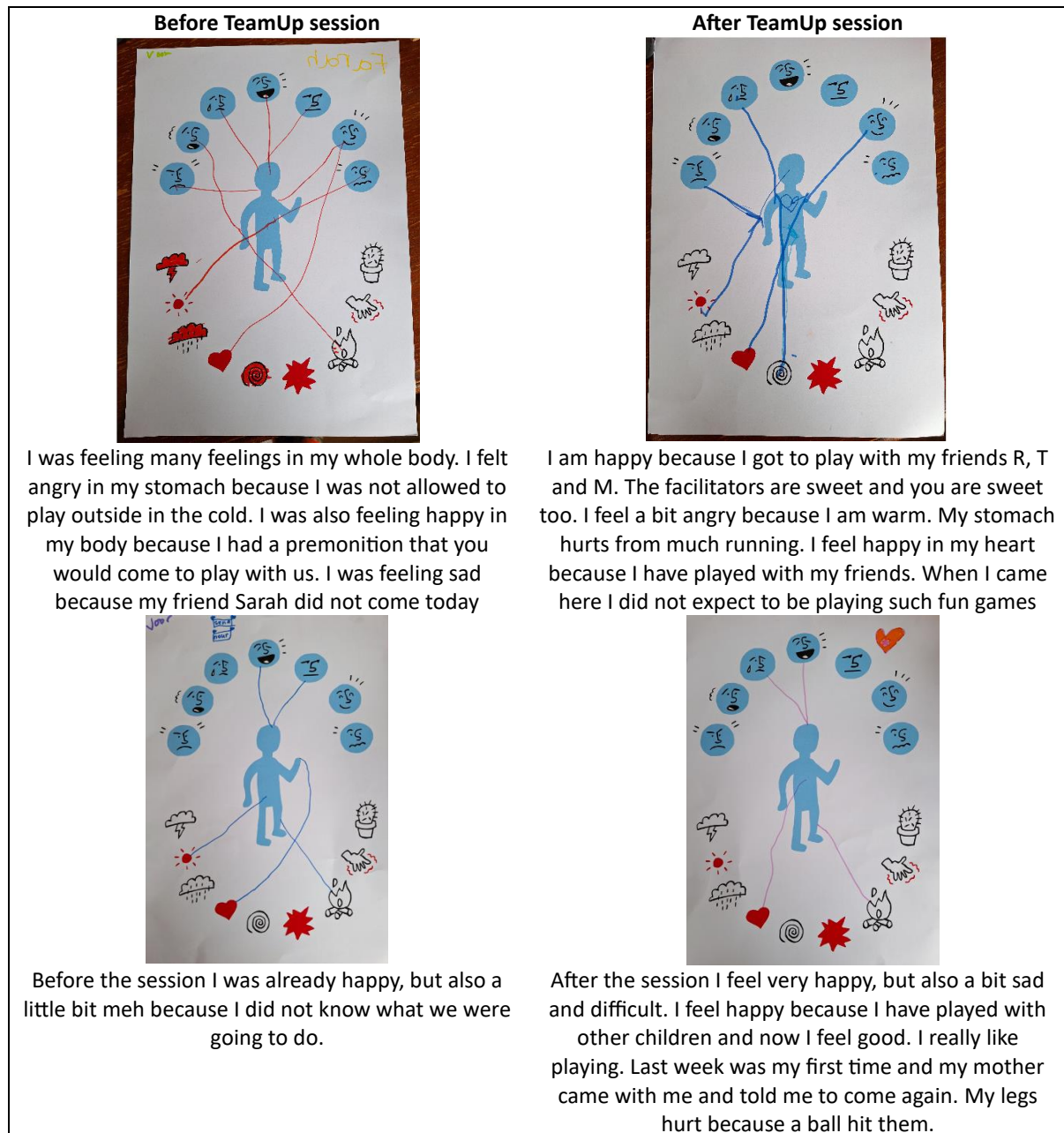
What children experience in their bodies after the TeamUp session

The findings show that being in TeamUp affects children's sensations, with both happy and angry emotions reported by the children. Some children feel happy in their heart because they have played, had fun and enjoyed playing with their friends. Some of the girls also mentioned feeling sad because their friends did not come and angry because one of the boys upset them by playing rough. More generally we found that girls do not like the sessions sometimes because the boys play rough. Children mentioned in the body mapping and in the participatory research that they sometimes feel upset,

⁸ We were not able to interview COA here

bored or angry before the start of the session, linked with not always being in the mood for it. They reported that playing and having fun in the session leads to them feeling happy.

Figure 6 Body mapping of feelings, sensations and emotions before and after the session in Location 4



Source: Authors' own

Creating social awareness through TeamUp

While we found that children are experiencing improvement in their mood with positive emotions following the session, we see less evidence in this group that social awareness is created through TeamUp. Children mainly reported learning new games. Only a couple of children in this group mentioned in their participatory research journey that they learnt something specifically about their friends because of TeamUp. For example:

"I thought that Nour was a bit arrogant, but then I learned she is a nice girl at the session." (11-year-old Syrian girl)

“Sarah is my best friend, first I thought she was aggressive and rough, but I learned at the session that she is a calm and nice girl and we became very good friends.” (10-year-old Syrian girl).

The findings suggest that this may be because the TeamUp structure is not implemented strictly in this location. Facilitators reported that there is often an unsafe atmosphere caused by multiple factors: the presence of one boy who displays very disruptive behaviour, when they do the session indoors, when there is stormy weather, group dynamics that exists between the children in the camp that are replicated within the TeamUp session, and the combination of the children who attend. The latter refers to when there are both younger (6–7-year-olds) and older (10-11-year-olds) children in the group, and the older children often act in a bossy way towards the younger children who, as a result, become shy. When the boy who displays disruptive behaviour is present or when existing disruptive group dynamics are very prevalent in the session due to a combination of children, the facilitators report spending most of their energy dealing with these dynamics, rather than playing the games that were planned. They feel that they do not have enough tools to cope with the group dynamics, the sessions being too short and the group changes too much. The facilitators feel that the children only get limited psychosocial benefits from the sessions. To manage the sessions better, the facilitators split the group into busy children and more quiet children. They feel that at least four facilitators are needed to cope with these challenging group dynamics.

On the other hand, when they can facilitate the sessions outdoors and there are no children displaying disruptive behaviour present, facilitators suggest that the children feel safer, the sessions are quieter and there is time to discuss and explain the games, which results in changes in behaviour, such as children becoming calmer and less aggressive. They also feel that children going into timeout helps with regulating their emotions, which contributes to changes in their behaviours. Facilitators are noticing that children become more patient in games where they have to wait their turn or when facilitators explain rules and are more assertive. The latter is particularly true for shy and new children, they become more assertive over time and when the facilitators explicitly get them to lead the games.

Increased social connectedness through TeamUp

Facilitators reported that children exclude each other based on their nationalities. They also note that they do not naturally adapt to other children when they play. Yet when they are facilitating games where children have to play in random duos, or hold hands or play in a circle, they notice that the children do connect with each other. Given that there are quite a lot of other activities for children to engage in, and plenty of outdoor space and playgrounds as well as a school in the AZC, children in this location have opportunities to meet and connect with other children outside of TeamUp. This relates to children sharing in their participatory research journey that sometimes they find TeamUp boring and too restricted in the games that they play.

However, in the participatory research journey and the parents and caregivers’ MSC stories we found that some children are not allowed to play outside by their parents/caregivers who are worried about safety. For these children TeamUp fills a gap, becoming an important place to connect with other children:

“We play together also outside TU, but we mostly play in TU because my mother doesn’t allow to play too much outside”. (10-year-old Syrian girl)

Aida: an 11-year-old Arabic girl living in Location 4, who has been in the Netherlands for 19 months.

According to her mother, Aida loves to join TeamUp, more so than her sister, who feels more shy to join. Aida herself says that she likes everything about TeamUp, because they play sports and games. Sometimes, however, she finds it a bit boring and prefers to play games outside of TeamUp because then they can play what they want. Through TeamUp she has become friends with Rahma (an 8-year-old Syrian girl). At first she thought that Rhama was a bit arrogant and looked down on other children, as if they didn’t know how to play the games, but then by seeing her play and playing with her in the sessions she realised that Rhama is nice and now they are best friends. She has also made friends in school.

Despite enjoying TeamUp and making friends in TeamUp and in school, her mental health has gotten worse over the past year, because the friends that she makes keep on leaving. While there are other children she can play with and who are nice, they do not speak the same language, so it is harder to communicate with each other and become friends. She expressed a lot of sadness about missing her old friends.

3.2 Main findings on social connectedness amongst children in Dutch AZCs

3.2.1 Parents and caregivers’ stories of change in their children’s social connectedness

Parents and caregivers shared changes from their children related to their social connectedness but also their emotions, attitudes, abilities, and behaviours through the MSC sessions. All changes that were described in their stories are listed in Tables A4.1-A4.3 (see Annex A4). They observed positive and negative changes in their children since moving to the asylum centre where they currently live. For example, while some parents/caregivers identified that their child had become more social, other parents/caregivers shared that they noticed their child becoming more closed off to other people. Regarding their behaviours, some parents/caregivers noticed that their child has become more violent, rude or angry, whereas other parents/caregivers noticed their child becoming calmer and more relaxed.

Parents and caregivers’ ranking and analysis of changes

We can see that all the changes that the parents and caregivers in Location 3 ranked as most important were related to social connectedness. In other locations, most important changes also related to what the children are learning (including things they are good at, what is right or wrong and acting more positively), changes in their behaviours: becoming angrier and rougher when playing, becoming more social, and changes in emotions: loving school and overcoming fear of security personnel.

Table 13 Parents and caregivers' ranking of most significant changes in their children*

Location 1	Location 2	Location 3	Location 4	Location 6
Accepted stay in NL.	Adapted to other cultures.	Communicated more.	Made friends with children from different countries.	Loves going to school.
Overcame fear of COA.	Learnt to act in a positive way.	Made friends with children from other cultures.	Became more comfortable in social situations.	Is more social.
More tolerant of children from other cultures.	Became more rough in play.	Increased empathy.	Learnt about things they are good at.	Has learnt to distinguish right from wrong.
Made friends with children from other cultures.	Became angrier.		Affected by children leaving AZC	
Communicated more with children from other cultures.	Interacts with different children.			

* Due to a small number of participating parents and caregivers and travel logistics we did not complete the ranking exercise in Location 5

Source: Authors' own

In all locations parents and caregivers ranked changes related to interacting with children from other cultures as amongst the most important, which included: children communicating more with children from other cultures, becoming more tolerant of children from other cultures, adapting to other cultures and making friends with children from different cultures. This was ranked by parents and caregivers as important because of the nature of the asylum centres where there are many children from other cultures living in small areas together. Parents and caregivers explained that by understanding and connecting with children from other cultures it helps them to integrate better in the centre. Parents and caregivers explained that they see these changes happen because they play with other children:

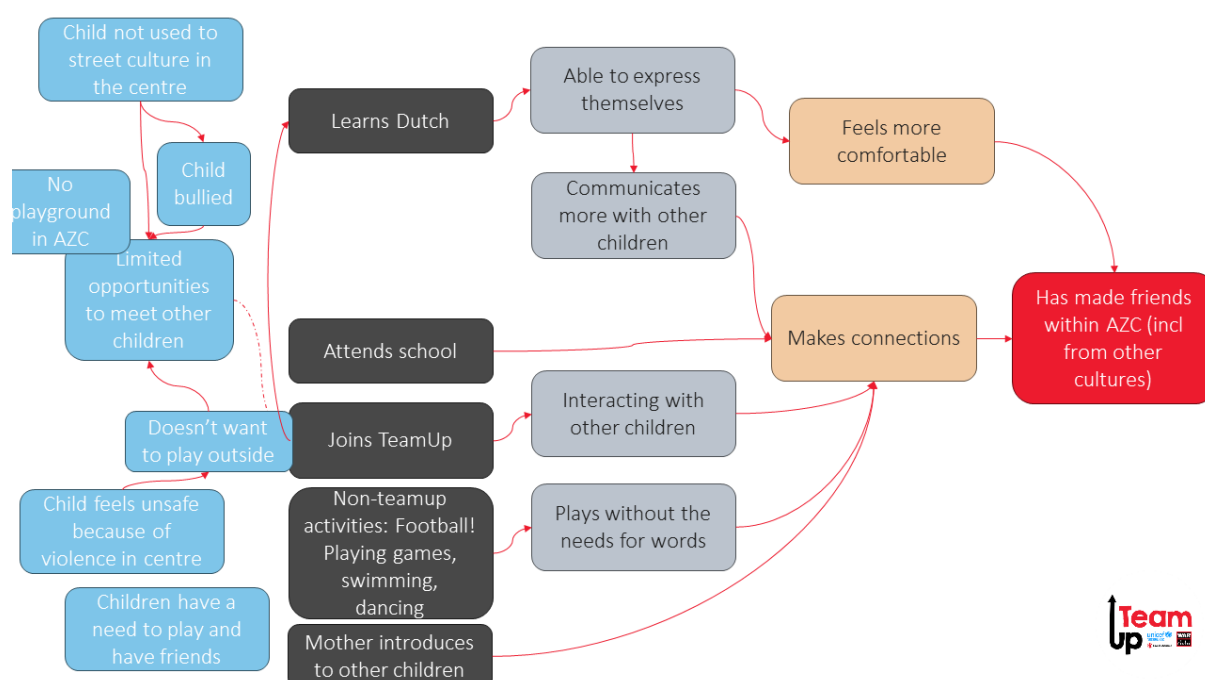
“Especially in the beginning, she found it strange to interact with both her schoolmates and foreign friends because she didn't know the language. She would stay in her room a lot. She didn't want to go to school... As her communication improved, as they played more and as she began to communicate with foreign children, my daughter opened up. Now, both at school and here, she feels comfortable expressing herself and playing with her friends. But she goes to TU activities on her own...Being together at school and in TU activities has strengthened their communication. I believe that TU has had a significant impact on my daughter playing with other children.” (Mother of Turkish girl, Location 3).

Causal pathways of changes in social connectedness

Outcome Area 1: Making friends with other children in the asylum centre

Our causal analysis revealed different pathways to the outcome of children making friends in the asylum centres (Figure 7). The pathways depended on their individual characteristics and the context of the asylum centre they are in. Figure 7 shows the different causal pathways. We describe the findings next.

Figure 7 Causal pathways from parents and caregivers' stories about their children who have made friends within the AZC (blue boxes are contextual conditions, black boxes are activities, red box is the outcome area and grey and yellow boxes are intermediate steps between the outcome area and the activities. Synthesised across 13 parents and caregivers' stories in 6 locations).



Source: Authors' own

One clear causal pathway starts from the need that children have to play and interact with other children. When this need is not fulfilled the children are bored. In the context of Location 2, there are many children of the same age and to fulfil their need to play and tackle their boredom, they find creative ways to get in touch with other children non-verbally, e.g. by playing football (which also happens in other centres) or playing together with toys. Through playing together they then make connections with other children and become friends.

"he was playing with some little children who spoke Arabic. I was impressed. The way they played. One little boy spoke one way and the other little boy another way. But the three played and none said a word, they only played with the car that rode here. They did everything with their hands. ... That impressed me a lot, because I was saying, I mean, somehow or other they looked for a way to communicate in their own way, they did." (Colombian mother Location 2).

While children find non-verbal ways to interact with each other, a second pathway towards becoming friends starts with children learning Dutch. For some children, once they learnt to speak Dutch they are able to express themselves and understand other children. This leads to them communicating more with other children and makes them feel more comfortable. A case of an Iranian child with learning difficulties highlighted this. She struggled with not being part of the dominant Arabic culture in the centre and the lack of children the same age, learning Dutch took longer for her because of her learning difficulties. Once she managed to learn Dutch in school, she was able to express herself better and become more comfortable in the centre and then made friends with other children.

The context of feeling unsafe or having a lack of safe spaces for children in the AZC makes it harder for children to make connections with other children. In Location 3, parents and caregivers emphasised that there is no playground in or around the centre and so there are limited spaces for children to play and make connections with other children. In Location 6, parents and caregivers mentioned that their

children feel unsafe or scared in the centre because of violence and therefore do not want to play outside. Children being unsafe and feeling unsafe in the AZC because of this violence therefore means that there are limited opportunities for children to meet other children. Across other centres, not being used to or part of the Arabic culture that is dominant in most asylum centres is a barrier to making connections with other children and sometimes lead to being bullied:

"Adapting for the kids is way more different: a new language, a different culture, actually different cultures. We are in the Netherlands of course, but in the camp, it is a bit different. There are people from more countries like Africa and Middle East, and they had to accept it. Therefore, it has been difficult to deal with this new culture because there are children also with psychological problems, that are aggressive, have bad behaviour and do not accept rules." (Colombian mother Location 4).

In these cases of less opportunities to connect with other children, joining TeamUp and going to school gives children a place where they can make connections that then lead to making friends in the AZC, because here they are forced to interact with other children, and they are safe spaces:

"TeamUp created a safe space for our children. It gave us, parents, peace of mind during that one hour. TeamUp is not frequent enough to have a meaningful effect on the children. Maybe 3 times per week could show a difference, but the way it is now, most significant changes are happening because of school and not TeamUp" (Iranian mother Location 6).

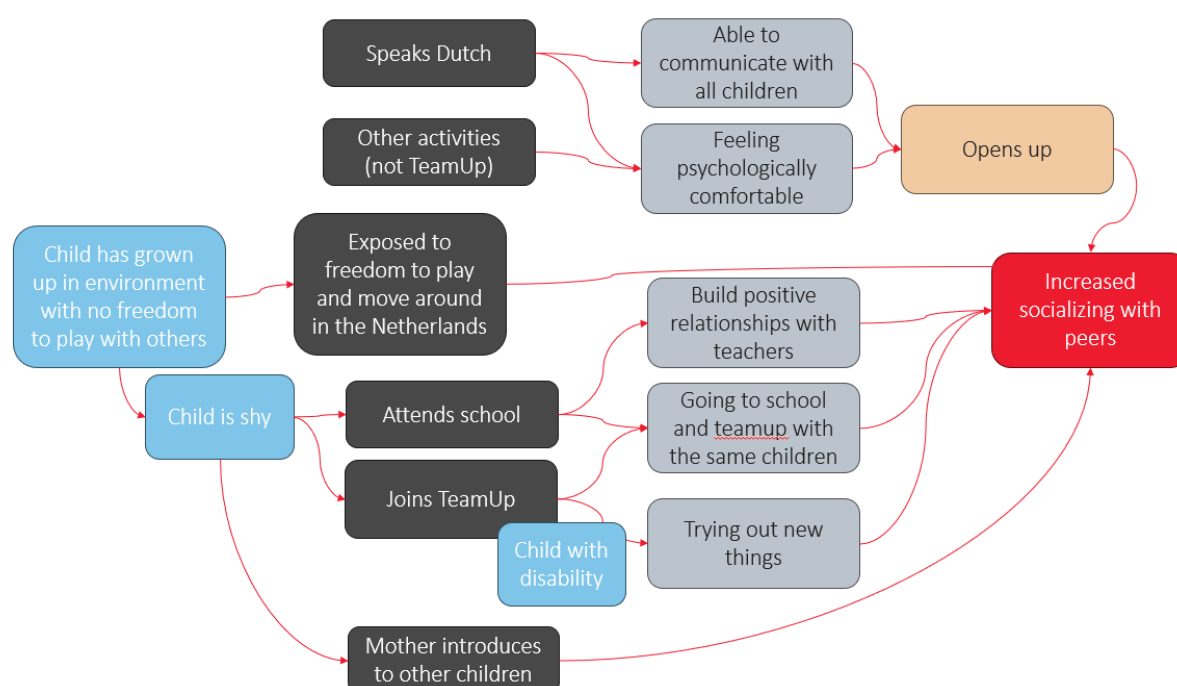
"I believe TU had a positive impact. The children she interacts with during TU activities are also in her class at school. When there's no TU activity, they rarely play together with the other children. Being together at school and in TU activities has strengthened their communication" (Turkish mother Location 3).

One Arabic mother from Location 3 highlights the active role she found she had to play in this context where there was bullying between the children, this made her son feel unsafe. She supported him to connect with other children who were not bullying by inviting them to her room and giving them drinks and sweets. This resulted in her son making friends with those children.

Outcome Area 2: Increased socialising with peers

Increased socialising with peers was ranked by parents and caregivers as a most significant change and was raised in 11 of the stories as an important change they have seen in their own child.

Figure 8 Causal pathways of increased socialising with peers (n=11)



Source: Authors' own

The first causal pathway is similar here as described above for the outcome area of making friends, learning to speak Dutch is an important contributing factor to children socialising more with their peers. When they learn to speak Dutch, they are able to communicate with more children and they start to feel more psychologically comfortable because they can express themselves. Feeling more comfortable is also triggered by engaging in activities in the AZC.

"Doing activities gives him psychological comfort. A while ago he went on a trip with his friends. When he came back he was psychologically comfortable, happy, he told me what they did, and where they went." (Syrian father, Location 5).

When children are able to communicate with others in Dutch and they feel psychologically comfortable, it allows the children to open up to others more, resulting in an increase in socialising with their peers who also speak Dutch.

A second causal pathway relates to children who are shy. The individual characteristic of being a shy child for some children was influenced by having grown up in environments where there were no other children, or less freedom to go and play with other children, such as refugee camps in Turkey and Greece. Now in the Netherlands they are going to school, where they build positive relationships with their teachers, which is contributing to them socialising more with their peers. Going to TeamUp in combination with going to school means that the children come across the same peers, which results in an increase in them socialising with their peers.

"The most reason behind the changes [playing more with other children] is that he started going to school. And it is the first school for him ever, he did not go to school in Somalia, Turkey or in Greece. So the school and the activities that you do every week [i.e. TeamUp] helped him a lot. And I also take him every Friday to my relatives living here in the Netherlands so that he can play and have a good relationship with them. That had helped me and my son to change from where he was." (Somalian mother, Location 4).

For some shy children the parents/caregivers proactively help their children connect with peers by introducing them to children of their friends or relatives or inviting other children to their house. For other children who have lived in refugee camps or unsafe places their whole lives, simply experiencing the freedom to move around and play in the Netherlands results in socialising more with their peers.

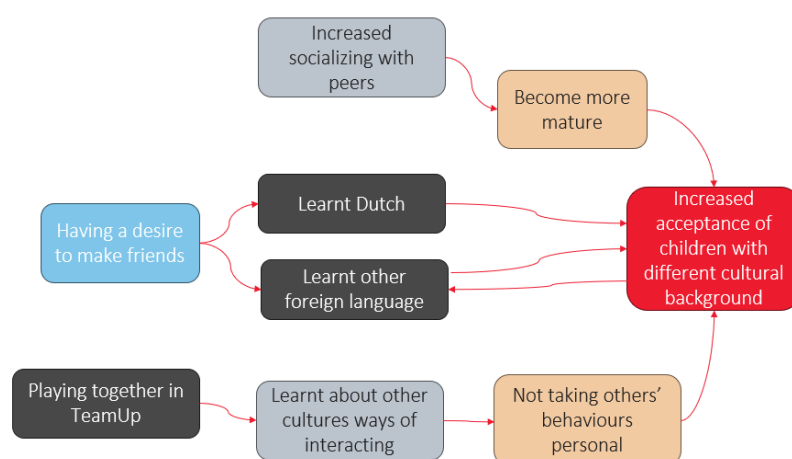
Parents and caregivers of children with a disability reported their children socialising more with their peers since they moved into the current camp. They attributed this change to their child going to TeamUp. For a Syrian boy from Location 4 this was because in TeamUp he tries out new things and learn new games, following which he can play with more children. For a boy with autism in Location 2 who does not have friends in the centre, TeamUp gives him a space to socialise more with his peers:

“When they [TeamUp facilitators] come to knock the door he join them he gets so happy here in our camp we don’t have activities we only have TeamUp it makes him so happy specially that my son doesn’t have friends my son like’s when someone from outside comes and tell him to join for a game” (Syrian mother, Location 2).

Outcome Area 3: Becoming more accepting of children from other cultures

Increased socialising with peers was not only an outcome, but for some parents/caregivers it was described as a contributing factor to accepting children from other cultures (See Figure 9).

Figure 9 Causal pathways of increased social acceptance of children with different cultural background (n=5)



Source: Authors' own

A Syrian father in Location 5 noticed that his son had become more grown up and mature because he started playing more with other children, which resulted in him becoming more accepting of children from other cultures:

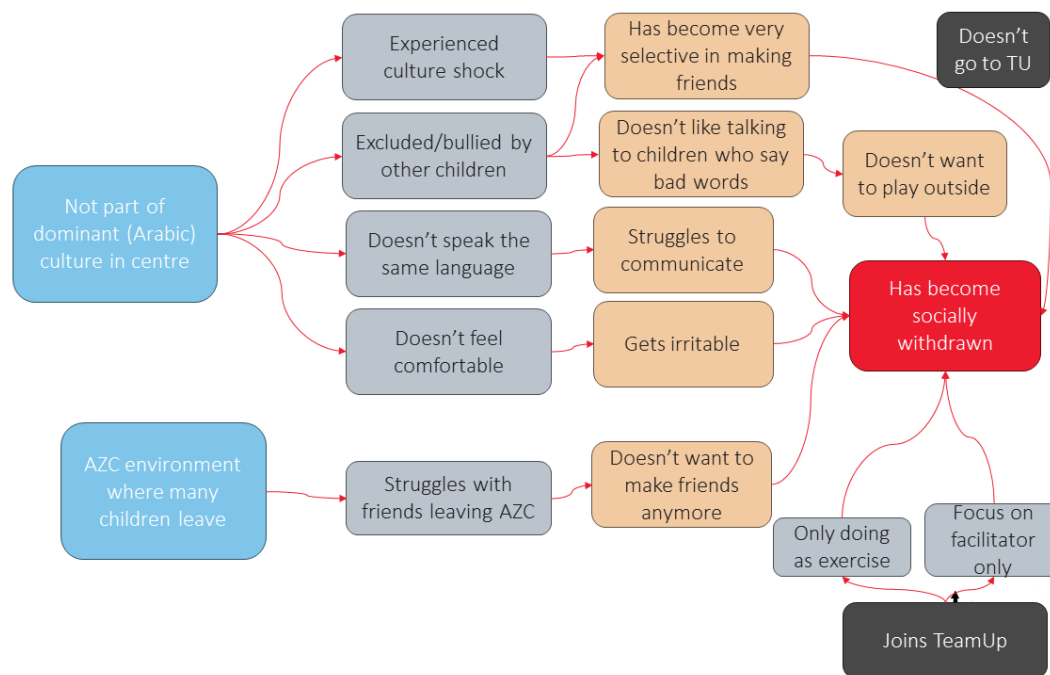
“mixing with people helps him grow, mature, and communicate with different cultures” (Syrian father, Location 5).

For other children, learning Dutch or learning other languages was a contributing factor to becoming more accepting of children from other cultures. Becoming more accepting of other cultures also contributed to learning other languages, so a feedback loop exists between cultural acceptance and foreign language learning. Learning other languages was driven by a desire to make friends in the story of one parent/caregiver from Location 2 who also described their child using other creative methods

to interact with other children, including gestures and translation tools and teaching words from each other's languages. TeamUp was also mentioned as contributing to accepting of children from other cultures by playing together in TeamUp. A parent/caregiver from Location 3 described that their child learnt that the other children's behaviours were just cultural and not aggressive behaviour they should take personally.

Outcome Area 4: Becoming more socially withdrawn

Figure 10 Causal pathways from parents/caregivers' MSC stories contributing to their child becoming more socially closed off (n=8)



Source: Authors' own

Eight parents/caregivers told stories of their child becoming more socially withdrawn as the most significant change that happened to their child since they moved to the AZC (See Figure 10). There are two main causal pathways leading to this change as described by parents/caregivers. The first one starts with children not being part of the dominant Arabic culture in the AZC or struggling to fit in even if they are Arabic themselves. For some children this leads to being excluded or bullied by other children, which leads to them not wanting to interact with children who swear and therefore not wanting to play outside because that is where they come across these children, which results in them becoming socially withdrawn. Not wanting to play outside also means not going to TeamUp, or for some children they will only go to TeamUp.

"The environment in this AZC is bad, the children don't have good manners and they use bad words. When my children go downstairs and hear the words the other children speak they will ask me about the words and I will tell them they are bad street words. The other children fight. Then my children refuse to go downstairs, they will only go if TeamUp is happening or I take them for outings out of the AZC, but when we come back they will just stay inside. This is not good for him emotionally, because we share a room with seven of us." (Syrian father, Location 1).

Other children, especially those from Latin American countries, experience being bullied and culture shock due to the dominant Arabic culture in the centre, which makes them more selective in who they are making friends with, resulting in them becoming socially withdrawn.

“It has been difficult to deal with this new culture because there are children also with psychological problems, that are aggressive, have bad behaviour and do not accept rules. As well parents with the culture of not being able to correct their kids, when necessary, this has made it hard for her to interact with some children, because it made her feel a bit scared, a bit restricted in a way. She (the daughter) is a very extroverted child. Normally for her is easy to take initiative and make new friends, but because of the different culture here and a lot of aggressive kids, it has been hard for her, depending on what type of children of course, to interact with them. She is usually analyzing the children first before getting them close to her and start playing with them. But she has also had moments when they have attacked her, or talked bad to her or mistreated her. So, her way of behaving is like preventing first.” (Colombian mother, Location 4)

Part of the struggle of not being part of the dominant culture also relates to not speaking the same language and this making it hard to communicate with other children, which leads to children being more socially closed off. Finally, feeling uncomfortable and therefore becoming more irritable was the reason why not being part of the dominant culture led to withdrawing herself for one Syrian girl.

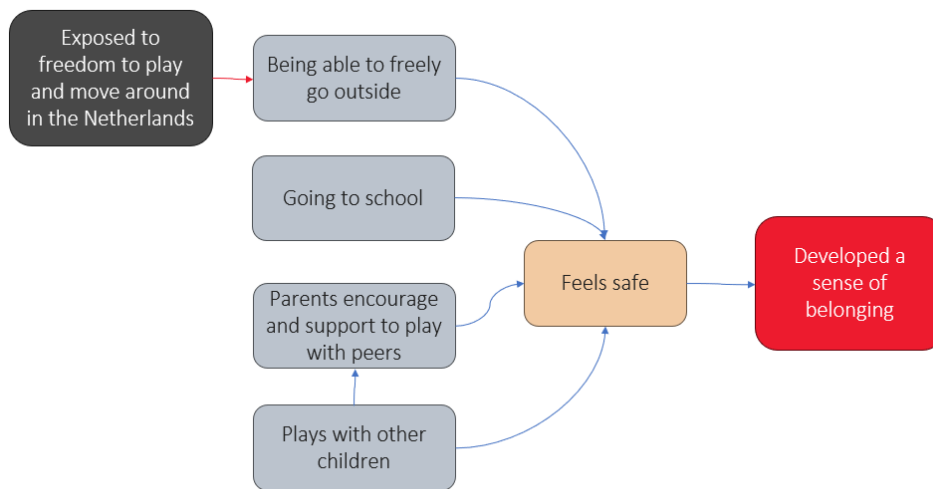
In the second causal pathway we find that the transient nature of the AZC and living conditions (little privacy, living with many people from around the world in a small space, waiting to hear about their procedure, many of whom had heavy experiences in their home country and during their flight etc), contributes to children becoming socially withdrawn. Parents and caregivers described that their children experience a lot of loss of friendships because their friends are relocated to a home or a different AZC, which leads to some children not wanting to make friends anymore because they did not see the point if they always leave again, which resulted in their child becoming socially withdrawn.

Some of the children who have become more withdrawn still go to TeamUp. However, several parents and caregivers describe that they go for the exercise, and focus most of their attention on interacting with the facilitator, rather than connecting with the other children, which means that even in TeamUp they remain socially withdrawn.

Outcome Area 5: Developed a sense of belonging

For one Kurdish girl from Location 3, developing a sense of belonging was described by her parents/caregivers as their most significant change (Figure 11). They described that this sense of belonging came about because they were feeling more comfortable, which resulted from the child playing with other children, parents/caregivers' encouragement and support, going to school, and being able to go outside freely because in the Netherlands they are free from oppression they have experienced in other places.

Figure 61 Causal pathway of developing a sense of belonging (n=1)



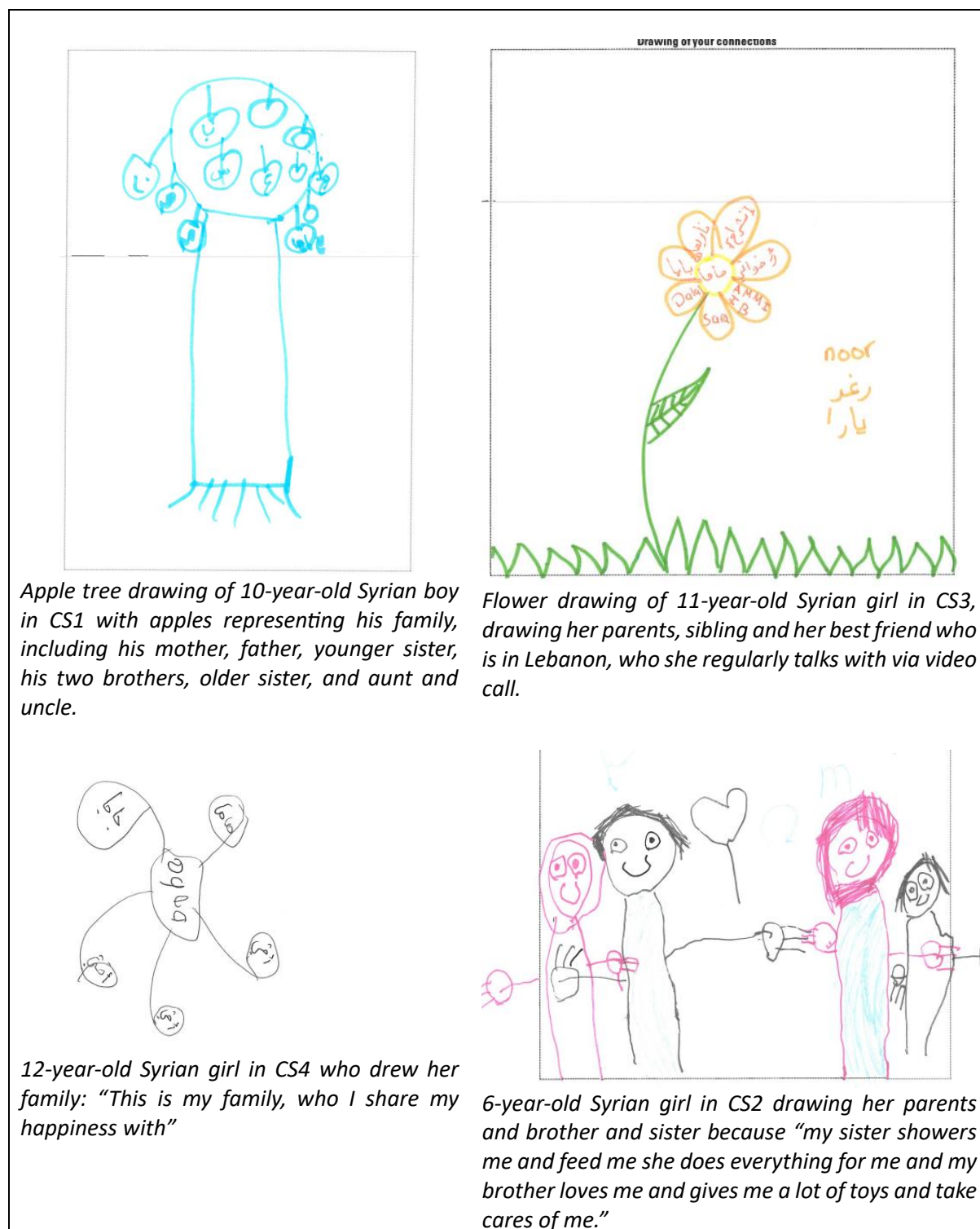
Source: Authors' own

3.2.2 Stories about social connectedness from children

Analysis across the 45 stories that were collected from the children about how they experience social connectedness revealed that a multitude of specific personal contextual factors lead to mainly unique experiences of social connectedness for children in asylum centres.

One pattern that stood out was when the children were asked to draw who the most important people are in their lives, that they most often mentioned their families, especially their parents/caregivers and their siblings, but also aunts and uncles (Figure 12). While this may be expected as most are in the Netherlands with their parents/caregivers and their siblings, they are still mentioned as most important even in cases when they are not in the same place, for example by children who are in the Netherlands with siblings, but whose parents/caregivers are still in their home country.

Figure 72 Children's drawings of the people who are most important in their lives



Source: Drawings by participating children

In their stories, most children describe how they have met their current friends on the first day or days⁹ of their arrival in the AZC. Children describe finding other children who are playing and becoming friends with them:

“When I first came to the camp, I went to the field where I found boys. We started playing soccer and having fun. We played the whole day. On the second day, I got to know everyone in the camp, so now everyone knows me, younger, older, and kids of my age.” (13-year-old Syrian boy CS4);

“We came to this AZC about a month ago. When we arrived, we cleaned the room with my brother and mother, and then I decided to go downstairs to see if I could make friends. I met Noor, Samah, and Asma, and they showed me the place. Since then, they always knock on my door, and I go with them” (10-year-old Yemeni girl CS2).

Other children explained how they were invited by other children to come and play with them:

“The first day I arrived I was happy because I made new friends and played with them, but I was annoyed by the kids trying to take my toys. Two brothers (M and R) were playing with ball in the garden. I went to sit with my family in the garden, where they invited me to play with them” (10-year-old Syrian boy CS1).

This illustrates that children actively play a role in welcoming other children to the centre and making them familiar. As they were also once new to the centre and were helped by others, they feel empathy towards the newly arrived children which motivates them to actively support them.

“I meet young people because I always look who is new in the camp. Then I get to know them and if they are new, I go out together and sometimes go to the city centre. Or just go for a walk. The minute people arrive they don’t really know anything. So we show them around, the supermarket and places they need to go. I like to do this because I like to do something good for people.”

“Because at some point we were those people. And we needed someone. I did this so many times because I put myself in their places” (13-year-old Syrian boy CS2).

Children’s stories also speak of reconnecting with family members they haven’t seen for a long time who are in the same centre, such as parents, aunts, uncles and cousins and running into children that they had seen in previous camps in the Netherlands or overseas:

“My first day in the camp was fun, I felt good, but after that it became even better. I met A first, he helped us. He helped translate for us in the beginning. He helped us by talking to COA in Dutch when we needed something. I liked meeting A. as the first person, because in Greece we were also already together. There we met each other by playing soccer together. He asked if he could play with us. I said yes and so we became friends in Greece. Inshallah, we will stay together forever. I was very happy when I saw him. Seeing him again was my best memory from being in this camp.” (10-year-old Kurdish/Iraqi boy CS1).

The evaluation team deepened our analysis through clustering of the stories based on the children’s AZC, gender, length of time in the AZC and self-described social nature. The latter was based on whether children made any statements about how social they are (e.g. calling themselves a ‘shy’

⁹ Here it is important to note that children were explicitly asked to describe their first day(s) in the AZC as the start of the storytelling data collection, creating some methodological bias towards the stories being told in a path dependent way.

person or a social person, someone who easily makes friends, or someone who prefers to be alone). This deeper (cross-case) analysis provided some indication that physical location of the AZC contributes to how children build and experience their social connectedness. We also found that gender plays a role. No patterns could be discerned based on how long children had been in their current AZC, which likely has to do with the transient nature of AZCs where people come and go all the time. We further describe these findings next.

Social nature of the children

The less social children include some of whom just prefer to be alone. Others experienced loss that contributed to them becoming less social. For example, moving between AZCs, friends leaving the AZC because they get a house or parents/caregivers fighting, that influences their self-ascribed ability to make friends. For the less social children, TeamUp potentially gives them a space to be with their friends.

More social children appear to have more diversity in their friend groups. They describe situations where they were with a diverse group of children, which contributes to them developing more diverse networks. Some of the more social children also described more ongoing relationships, for example already having friends outside of the centre that they have connected with before moving to this centre. Others describe how they feel they have to be selective in making friends given the large number of people they can engage with. They describe having an explicit process or criteria for deciding on who to become friends with:

“New people are important for me but you need to choose the new people. I start a conversation with them and from that I can tell what kind of person it is, if he is good or has something bad. Then I decide if the person can become my friend. There are too many bad people here, and too many good people. Bad people I keep more distance but I still say ‘hi how are you? Bye’ But I don’t ignore them. In order to be my friends they need to respect me and be honest. If they don’t fit my criteria they will not be my friend.” (14-year-old Syrian boy CS4).

Location

There is evidence from the children’s stories that the physical environment of the AZC contributes to how the children make and maintain social connections. Table 14 provides an overview related to some of the key points we analysed based on children’s stories about their social connectedness. Children in Location CS4 overall appeared less satisfied with their social connectedness and there seemed to be an overall sense of disliking the camp. There were more children here compared to other locations expressing that they do not have as many friends as they’d like or are not as close to the friends that they have. They explained this was due to various factors they perceive as barriers to creating social connections, such as other children spending their time in their rooms on electronic devices (phones, PlayStations), there not being many children from their age group, or perceiving that other children already have good friends and are not in need of new friends. In contrast, the data shows that stories from CS2 share a more positive feeling about the centre. There are more activities organised for the children and children generally seem satisfied with the number of friends they have in the centre. TeamUp is often mentioned positively in CS2, whereas it was barely mentioned in the stories from CS4. In both CS4 and CS3 children come together and organise their own TeamUp and highlight that TeamUp gives them ideas for games to play.

Table 14 Key contextual factors related to AZC location that influence social connectedness based on children's stories

<p>CS1</p> <p><i>This is a small size AZC that can host 250 people. There are recreation spaces, green spaces and play grounds for children. The city centre is walking distance from the AZC. There is a good relationship between TeamUp and COA here. There is a good connection with other parts of the city and facilities, including the local football club. There are many Yazidi families here.</i></p>	<p>CS2</p> <p><i>This is a medium size AZC with 400-500 people living here. There is green space between the buildings and space for children to play. There are many other activities here for children, including Time4You, creative activities. The AZC is close to the city centre.</i></p>	<p>CS3</p> <p><i>This is a larger AZC with 500 – 600 spaces. It is located outside of the town in a forest, which means it is secluded and you have to get to and from there by bike, which takes about 10-15 minutes to get to town. There are limited things to do for children. There are two TeamUp sessions here. Facilitation team has fluctuated but is recently more stable. Different types of buildings with lots of space in between. During mobilisation some children don't want to participate which is ascribed to less trust with COA.</i></p>	<p>CS4</p> <p><i>This is a small AZC with 200 to 300 people living here. It's secluded in a forest, near a small town. TeamUp is the only activity here and they have a large group of children coming to the sessions here.</i></p>
COA puts in a lot of effort to create a welcoming atmosphere in the centre and linking children to the outside activities	Overall more positive vibes, more activities to do for the children	Large, maybe more disjointed centre – outside of town. Higher levels of mistrust towards COA for some families.	Children dislike it here: "Everyone here hates this camp" 13-year-old Syrian Boy CS4
A younger group	Greater variety in how children describe their experience of social connectedness and how it develops	Children are younger ages	More similarity in the children's stories Children here are slightly older (teenagers)
There is a garden that they can go out and play in	There is a playground in this centre that is often mentioned	There are many things to do here, it is a big AZC with many activities organised	Location outside the town in the forest
Mentions of fights and quarrels, including no longer being friends anymore.	Children mention they have many friends and TeamUp is often positively mentioned	Children go to TeamUp and organize their own TeamUp sessions.	Children seem to be more dissatisfied with the social connectedness here. Children come together and play and create their own fun 'go out and do their own teamup'

Source: Authors' own

CS1, CS2, and CS4 appear to have spaces where children can come together and find each other to play (e.g. a garden, playground) and even though CS4 is in a forest (hence plenty of outdoor space for playing), the children did not think there are opportunities to meet other children. In CS1 more children mention having friends outside of the centre, which is likely connected to COA putting in effort to link the children to activities outside of the AZC, especially football. In CS1 there were more mentions of children about fights and quarrels between friends, including mentioning that they stopped being friends. Here there is also a strong connection between Yazidi boys who are often excluded and bullied by Arabic speaking children and therefore are drawn together to support each other.

Gender

Across all stories parents/caregivers, siblings and other family members are mentioned as important by all the children, regardless of gender. They also show some differences between how boys and girls make connections and experience their social connectedness. A first difference is the activities that the boys and girls engage in. Boys love playing football and do this a lot, including with clubs outside of the centre, making friends through football. Girls were more likely to mention that they engage in activities such as reading, drawing, and doing arts and crafts. Here we find an interplay between the kind of activities that are offered in the AZC and gender, where for boys it might be relatively easier to connect with others when there are spaces to play football than it is for girls to connect through their preferred activities and vice versa, when arts and crafts activities are offered (like Kleurfabriek) compared to physical activities. This is not to say that girls never like football or being physically active, as there are also girls who report that they prefer TeamUp over other activities because they get to expend more of their energy. Both boys and girls mentioned playing other games as a way to connect and spend time with other children.

In terms of how they relate to their friends, some of the boys' stories show that they were selective in who was going to be their friend.. This includes setting criteria for who can become your friend and not accepting everyone. This selection process was not mentioned by girls, who on the other hand describe more nuance in their relationships and talk more about fights they have with their friends, how they check in on each other when one of them looks sad and how they set rules around fights between them:

"Only one girl is a little angry, and she and my friend B hit each other. But then they made up. And then we made the agreement [in their group]. Because if you are sad about something or you do not agree with something, then you withdraw and get irritated and angry. The other will then not be angry back so that you don't get into a fight. That is because we made this agreement and we will stick to that. I don't want to cause problems. When my friends get into a fight, I calm them and talk to them. I make sure that they don't make problems. I don't like problems." (11-year-old Kuwait girl in CS3).

Girls often mention that they do not like playing with boys because they are often too rough.

4. Responses to evaluation questions

In this section we directly respond to the three evaluation questions through synthesis across the findings presented above. In line with our realist-inspired CA approach, we start with the broader question around social connectedness which gives a deeper understanding of the contextual dynamics in the AZCs. We then focus in on how these broader contextual dynamics influence the TeamUp sessions and the more proximate outcomes of social awareness and embodied emotions.

4.1 Factors shaping social connectedness of children in Dutch Asylum centres

Evaluation question: How are children in Dutch AZCs experiencing social connectedness and what factors play a role in shaping this?

The purpose of this evaluation question was to look at the more distant outcome of social connectedness and investigate how TeamUp might be one amongst other contributing factors. We captured a variety of experiences of social connectedness amongst children across 10 AZCs through their own stories, their parents/caregivers' stories and the children's participatory research journeys. Experiences of social connectedness include how children make initial connections with their friends, how they build and maintain these relationships and their connections with family. We also captured children's experiences of a lack of social connectedness, including those who have become more socially withdrawn and who feel dissatisfied with their social connectedness.

Table 15 Quality of evidence underpinning Hotspot 3 conclusions

Dimension	Rating	Reasoning
Triangulation	5	Conclusions are based on high quality data from children and parents/caregivers. We've collected detailed data from parents/caregivers and children that informed the conclusions. This may be the first time that parents/caregivers' viewpoints are this strongly represented in a TeamUp evaluation
Representativeness	5	The conclusions represent a variety of sometimes contradictory viewpoints about how social connectedness is developed, based on children's characteristics and institutional context. Some level of agency through the narrative approach (means participants decide what they want to share) and the additional analysis sessions that were done on the data with parents/caregivers and children.
Uniqueness	5	Clear detail on contextual factors that contribute to social connectedness and clear explanation about how TeamUp fits within this across different locations and for different children
Plausibility	4	TeamUp has links to the outcome of social connectedness, but the causal links are more nuanced because of all the other contextual factors that contribute to social connectedness of the children. In situations where there are fewer other opportunities, the contribution of TeamUp can be stronger.

Source: Authors' own

Conclusion 1: A web of social connectedness for children in Dutch AZCs

The primary source of social connectedness of children in Dutch AZCs appears to be their family. All children engaged were here with their family, the majority with their parents/caregivers and some with just siblings or aunts or uncles. Many children have siblings and because of the nature of the AZC they spend most of their time in their rooms with their siblings. This aligns with findings from other research that highlights the importance of refugee children's families in their social connectedness as

a factor for the mental health of refugee children in different high income countries, including the Netherlands (Asamoah & Gardeniers, 2023; Marley & Mauki, 2019).

Children also connect with and establish friendships with peers in the AZC. They especially connect with children with similar characteristics, including being the same age, gender and cultural backgrounds. Children who go to school or engage in sport or other activities outside of the AZC also establish connections with peers outside of the AZC, including Dutch children.

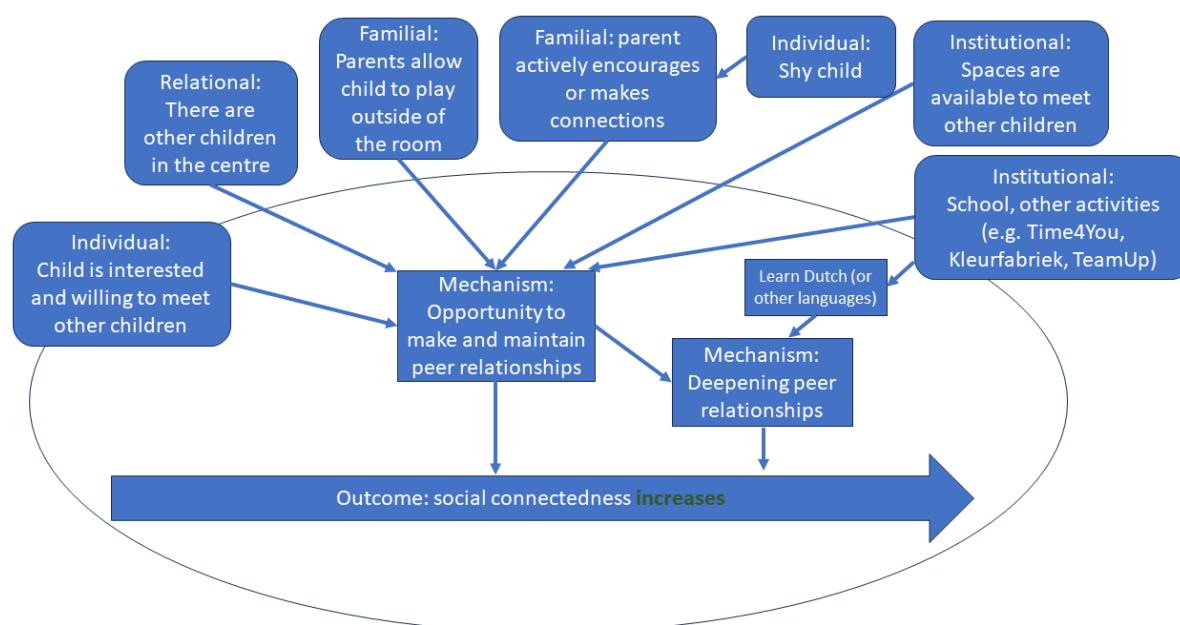
Adults other than their parents/caregivers can play an important caring role in the lives of the children. Teachers were often mentioned by parents and caregivers because they pay close attention to and have positive attitudes towards their children, children feel connected to their teachers. The positive and friendly approach from Dutch teachers was contrasted with how their children were treated by teachers in Turkey or Syria, especially for Kurdish children. TeamUp facilitators were other adults who became a source of social connectedness for the children, especially in locations where the facilitators have been coming for a longer time (>1 year), live in the same AZC and/or speak the language of the child. This reflects findings by Emerson et al. (2022) and Asamoah and Gardeniers (2023) that supportive adults in both school and home environments play important roles in the lives of refugee children and promote psychosocial wellbeing.

Conclusion 2: A range of opportunities to make and maintain peer relationships increase social connectedness

This section summarises the factors that play a role in children's social connectedness with their peers. Figure 13 illustrates how in AZC locations where there are physical spaces where children can spend time outside of their room (e.g. playgrounds, sport fields, common spaces indoors), children feel safe enough to go outside and their parents/caregivers allow them to play, they will go out of their rooms to play where they meet other children. If these children are of the same age, gender and sometimes cultural backgrounds they will play together and can become friends over a period of time and maintain these friendships by continuing to play with each other, go to school together and go to TeamUp together.

Often these first interactions happen relatively soon after the children arrive in the AZC. Existing children often notice new children arriving and include these new children in their games or explicitly help these new children settle in. These approaches by the existing children help the new children feel settled and connected quickly. This behaviour aligns with a recent body of literature which is finding that adverse childhood experiences are associated with an increase in altruistic behaviours, including helping a stranger (Gomis-Pomares & Villanueva, 2023; Lim & DeSteno, 2016; Prior et al., 2021). This link is explained because people with experience of past adversity have increased empathy, which is linked to compassion for people in need, resulting in behaviours that assist others. Participating children indeed explained their helpful behaviour as a result of having once been in the situation of the new child and understanding what they are going through (empathy), which motivated them to help them.

Figure 8 Contextual factors (individual, familial, relational and institutional) that create opportunities to make, maintain and deepen peer relationships which results in increased social connectedness



Source: Authors' own

Children (and all people) have an inherent need to connect with others and feel like they belong, children also have a need to play. There are often many children in asylum centres and even if children do not speak the same language, they can find creative and playful ways to interact with each other and create their own opportunities to make and maintain relationships with their peers. We found that when children speak the same language, or learn Dutch and speak this with other children, they can better express themselves, feel more comfortable and thereby develop deeper social connections with their peers.

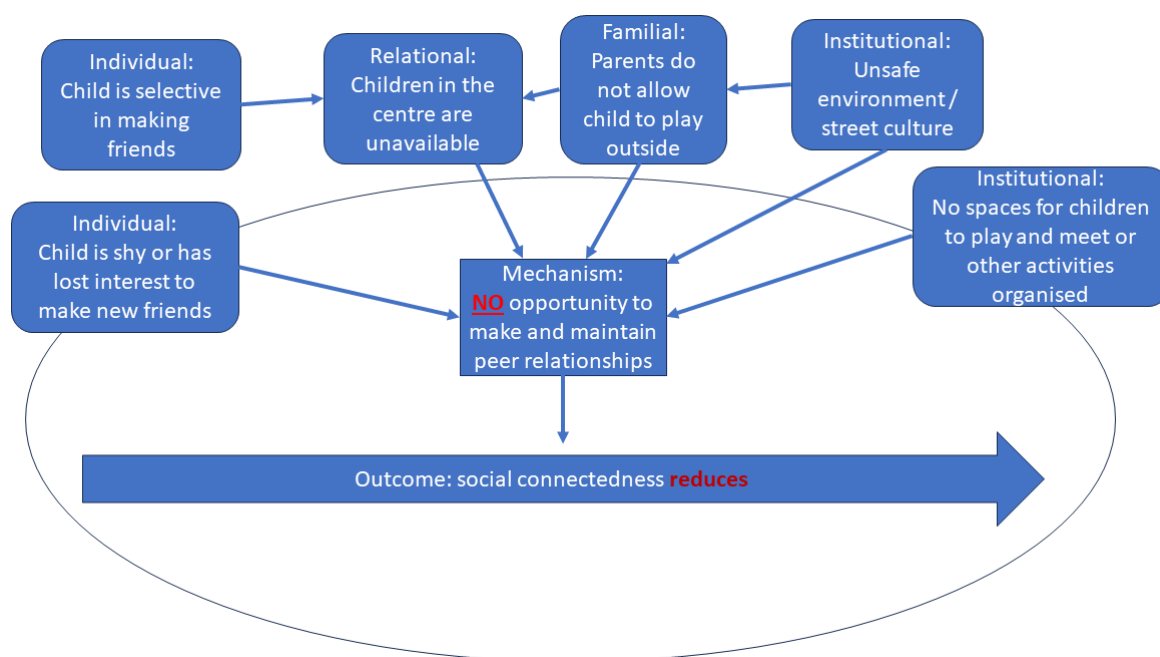
For some children who are shy or nervous it prevents them from being able to access opportunities to make and maintain friendships. Not all is lost for these children, as this evaluation was showing that when their parents/caregivers are actively encouraging them to make connections, or establish connections for them, this creates safe opportunities for these children to make and maintain friendships and increases their social connectedness.

Based on the children's stories, in locations where there are other activities present, TeamUp contributes less to children's social connectedness than in locations where TeamUp is the only activity. This includes activities such as the Vrolijkheid, Kleurfabriek, Time4You or activities outside of the centre. This is based on the observation that TeamUp was mentioned less by the children in their stories in such contexts. But even though there are many other activities, children do still go to TeamUp in these places as well, indicating some intrinsic motivation that attracts them to join TeamUp.

Conclusion 3: A range of factors prevent opportunities for social connectedness

While we found many positive reflections of children feeling socially connected to their peers, their parents/caregivers or others, there were also children reporting lower levels of social connectedness, who felt lonely or were socially withdrawn. Different individual, familial and institutional contextual factors mean that these children do not have the opportunity to make or maintain relationships with their peers, resulting in reduced social connectedness (Figure 14).

Figure 9 How contextual factors prevent opportunities for peer relationships, resulting in reducing social connectedness



Source: Authors' own

On an individual level, some children are naturally shyer and more withdrawn than others, however other children have become shyer or socially withdrawn because of their refugee journey. Some children have grown up in refugee camps in Turkey and Greece in which they and their parents/caregivers felt unsafe, and therefore where they were not able to freely play with other children. They therefore did not learn the required socializing skills from a young age, resulting in them now finding it harder to make connections. For other children, the transient nature of their refugee journey and living in camps and the loss of connections that comes with that, has affected their ability and/or willingness to make and maintain relationships with other children. For some children, this results in them becoming more socially withdrawn and feeling less socially connected. For other children (especially those who are older), this resulted in them becoming more selective in who they are becoming friends with. While this then results in a lower quantity of social connections, it does not necessarily reduce the quality of their social connections. However, it does sometimes mean that children do not find other children within the AZC who meet their criteria and therefore end up feeling less socially connected.

On an institutional level, this evaluation as well as other investigations (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, 2024; Werkgroep Kind in AZC, 2018; Zijlstra et al., 2020) have found that AZCs can be an unsafe environment for children when there is a strong street culture present, eg. with normalized violent behaviours and bullying. For parents/caregivers, especially non-Arabic parents/caregivers, arriving in these centres can be a culture shock and they may decide to not allow their children to play outside of their room because they find it too unsafe for them and children themselves might feel too scared to leave their rooms, especially those who experience being bullied or who have had experience with

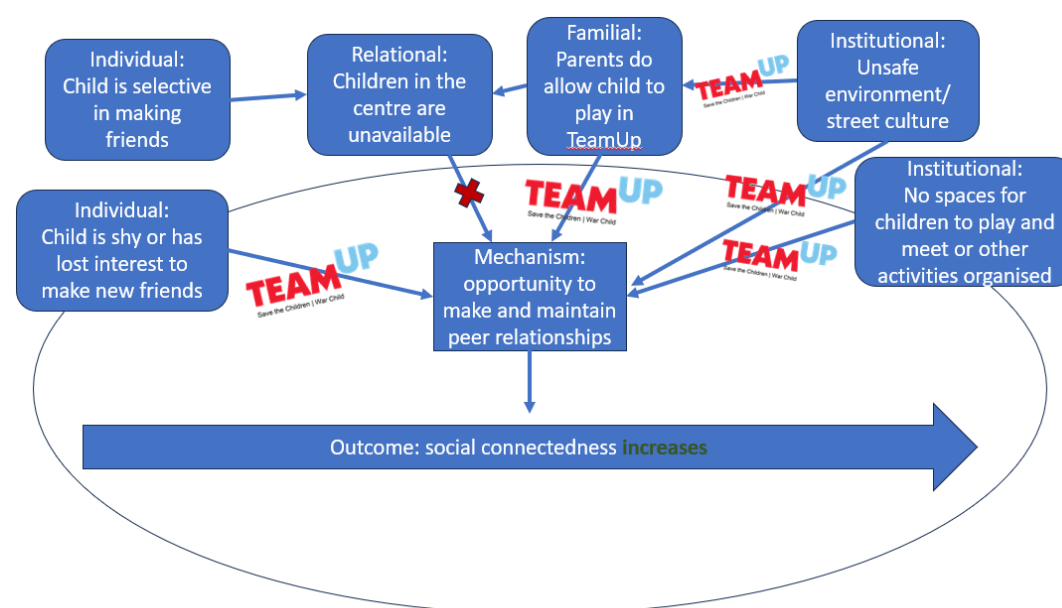
unsafe incidents. This results in these children having less opportunities to make and maintain friendships and results in them feeling less socially connected to their peers beyond their family. Other AZCs might have less space for children to play regardless of whether they are safe or not, which means that for children there are less opportunities to meet their peers and establish relationships. These opportunities are also reduced when others spend most of their time in their rooms, because they feel unsafe or because they spend more time on their digital devices rather than being outside. Children might also perceive other children to be unavailable because children may already be in existing friend groups when they arrive. This also means that some children do not have the opportunity to make and maintain friends with their peers, reducing their sense of social connectedness.

Conclusion 4: TeamUp as part of a broader causal package supports children's social connectedness

There is evidence that TeamUp is a contributing factor to children's social connectedness in combination with other factors. There is little to no evidence that TeamUp is a unique contributing factor to social connectedness on its own. While there may be a more direct link between TeamUp and increased social connectedness for children where fewer other opportunities exist (e.g. for socially withdrawn children, AZCs with few other activities), here there are still always other factors that interact with TeamUp's contribution to social connectedness (e.g. school, parents/caregivers). Figure 15 shows how and when TeamUp can make contributions to create opportunities for children to make and maintain relationships with their peers, which results in increases in social connectedness. For children who are new to the AZC or children who are shy, TeamUp provides children with the opportunity to find and connect with other children in the centre in a space where they are facilitated to play with other children, especially because they are forced to play games in teams with children they would not otherwise play with. For children who have been in the AZC for a longer time, TeamUp provides a space where they can go and have fun and deepen their connections with their friends. The presence of their existing friends within TeamUp also provides a safe space to interact with other children they do not normally play with.

In AZCs where there is a strong street culture, where children feel unsafe and/or where parents/caregivers do not allow their children to play outside of their room, TeamUp can provide a safe space for children to play. In these contexts, parents/caregivers will often let their children play in TeamUp, because there are adults present who can ensure the safety of their children (this especially happens when this is clearly explained to the parents/caregivers during mobilization). Children also feel safer here because the adult facilitators mediate when there are fights happening between the children. This then means that children will have space to play and make connections with their peers. This also means that children who normally do not play outside become available to other children to play with. Similarly, in AZCs where there are less opportunities for children to play because there are no outdoor spaces, playgrounds, or common areas, TeamUp becomes a place where children can make and maintain friendships. However, in these contexts it is important to note the limitation of TeamUp only being an hour a week, and that for some children this contributes to their social connectedness (especially those who are not allowed to play outside normally), for other children it might not actually contribute to their social connectedness, because even though they might meet other children at TeamUp, there are no other places for them to meet and interact again and therefore are not able to continue to build their relationships outside of the hour a week that they play within TeamUp.

Figure 10 How TeamUp is able to create contextual conditions to trigger opportunities for children to make and maintain peer relationships, resulting in increased social connectedness



Source: Authors' own

4.2 Embodiment and social awareness

Evaluation question: How, for whom and in what context does embodiment experienced in TeamUp contribute to children's social awareness?

Our initial programme theory assumed that when children are able to embody their feelings, sensations and emotions in a TeamUp session it opens up space for them to attune to other children's emotions and through that become more socially aware of other children. This social awareness includes understanding other children's strengths, weaknesses and cultural norms.

Table 16 Quality of evidence underpinning Hotspot 2 conclusions

Dimension	Rating	Reasoning
Triangulation	4	Conclusion 5 and 6 are underpinned by data from different sources (parents/caregivers, children, facilitators, COA) that are corroborated to establish connections between intervention and outcome, whereas conclusion 7 does not have the underpinning from multiple data sources.
Representativeness	5	The conclusions represent nuanced and contradictory views that indicate that the unique viewpoints of participants are represented. There is less agency in this complicated context of evaluation in asylum centres where people have less agency. There was more involvement in analysis of the data by children interpreting their experiences in their participatory research journey.
Uniqueness	5	Clear explanation of uniqueness of what happens in terms of structure and games in TeamUp sessions and how they contribute to building social awareness in children (e.g. explicitly bringing together children in a group across different cultures).

Plausibility	5	Strong evidence that provides a strong plausible, logically signposted story of key steps underpinned by data of how TeamUp contributes to development of social awareness.
	2	In relation to a causal pathway about how embodiment specifically links TeamUp and social awareness we have less evidence. The explanation shows a possible connection based on theoretical explanation and some indication from the data from this evaluation and previous TeamUp evaluations.

Source: Authors' own

Conclusion 5: TeamUp contributes to development of social awareness

We found evidence from the children, parents/caregivers, facilitators and COA that TeamUp does contribute to development of social awareness in children who participate. This includes cultural sensitivity, where children recognise that others have different cultural backgrounds that influence their behaviours. This allows them to then find ways to interact and play together despite cultural differences. This was particularly present in locations where the TeamUp facilitators explicitly undertake activities where the children are mixed into groups with others from different cultural backgrounds from themselves. The evidence shows that when they are then playing together, especially in games where they have a shared goal, children forget about their cultural differences and see that they can all play together and be nice to each other, regardless of their cultural background. Sometimes they have to play together against their will, and in these occasions the facilitator's explanation about why they are being put together in a group helps them to accept this and allows them to play together.

Increased social awareness is closely linked to building relationship skills, such as listening to each other, playing together, not fighting and not to being disrespectful towards each other. Especially in the locations where TeamUp facilitators emphasised implementing the TeamUp structure and repeating and enforcing the rules during the sessions, the children reported they had developed these social awareness skills. Children also highlighted that they value TeamUp facilitators enforcing these rules to help them as children play better together.

Conclusion 6: The AZC culture and TeamUp structure interplay in development of social awareness

As described in section 4.1, in many of the AZCs there is a strong street culture with violence and aggression. People tend to live in cultural silos, with Arabic culture often being dominant, which can make people and children from other cultures feel excluded and unsafe, especially when explicit bullying is taking place (e.g. this is mentioned to regularly happen between Arabic and Kurdish Syrians). In some locations this street culture spills into the TeamUp session, repeating similar patterns of aggression and violence which makes it difficult (if not impossible) for the facilitators to implement the intended TeamUp session structure. This leads to attendance dropping and changing in nature with different children joining each session. Children might decide not to attend at all, or to join the sessions just for the games, ignoring the other children. In these locations children can still have fun and experience positive emotions in the TeamUp sessions, but TeamUp's contribution to development of social awareness for the children is diminished.

In locations where there are both strong facilitators and sufficient numbers (at least four) of facilitators, they are better able to implement the TeamUp structure (including the use of the themes, explaining and enforcing rules, using routines, using timeout space), which prevents the street culture from taking over the TeamUp session. Under these conditions there is evidence that children do acquire social awareness skills.

Conclusion 7: Causal relationship between embodied experiences and development of social awareness remains unclear

Whilst we found evidence that TeamUp can contribute to building social awareness in the children, we have not gathered enough specific evidence to explain the causal process between children's embodied experience of their emotions and their increased social awareness (causal hotspot 2). This does not mean that this may not be happening. TeamUp's non-verbal modality is potentially key to developing social awareness, which is supported by intersubjectivity theory (Kokkinaki et al., 2023), and in particular embodied affectivity (Fuchs & Koch, 2014). Embodied affectivity explains that we become aware of other people's emotions because of their embodied expression of their emotions, which we become aware of because our bodies mirror their physical expression of their emotions. By mirroring these expressions, our bodily feedback allows us to experience similar emotions, helping us to understand how others are feeling. This again triggers an embodied response in us, which the other person observes and again influences their emotions and helps them to understand both their own emotions and how other people respond to their emotions (Blain et al., 2023; Fuchs & Koch, 2014). This process of embodied affectivity allows empathetic understanding to develop (Fuchs & De Jaegher, 2009).

Facilitators reported that they notice changes in children when they are playing games where they have a shared goal in teams or where they have to hold hands or play in a circle. Other research has found that when people make 'approaching movements' with their bodies, they feel more positive towards the person they are making this movement towards (Koch, 2014). Possibly, the action of holding hands in TeamUp works in a similar embodied way, which was indicated in the 2020 evaluation of TeamUp in School where it was found that through touching each other (handshake or holding hands), children started to understand the other children better and seeing them as someone they could potentially be friends with (TeamUp, 2020a). The part of the intervention where children work together towards a shared goal can also contribute to increased social awareness through underlying embodied experiences, as an important part of cooperation is to learn about people's motives. Whilst cognitive theories suggest that such learning needs to happen on a high-level mental functional level and include verbal processing, embodied theories of cooperation which might apply to TeamUp state that when cooperating, people become aligned on multiple levels (emotional, behavioural, cognitive states) and this alignment helps them to be aware of others different points of views and perspectives and thus contributes to social awareness (Fantasia et al., 2014; Tollefsen & Dale, 2012).

4.3 Safety and embodiment

Evaluation question: How, for whom and in what contexts does TeamUp's safe space allow children to embody their emotions?

Table 17 Quality of evidence underpinning Hotspot 1 conclusions

Dimension	Rating	Reasoning
Triangulation	4	Data for these conclusions came from facilitators and the children. Children's perspectives were gathered from their body mapping and their participatory research duty. The data was not as high quality as it would have ideally been due to how the bodymapping was completed, which included a high level of interpretation from the evaluation team and there were not as many body maps as originally planned.
Representativeness	3	Data was directly collected from children and facilitators. Children were involved in a first level of analysis by interpreting their own body maps during the reflection and in their reflections during the

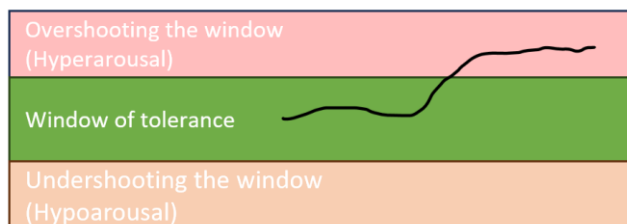
		participatory research journey. To push this ranking to a 4 there should have been a further analysis with children and facilitators on the body map data following each session.
Uniqueness	5	The questions here were very specific about TeamUp. What makes this particularly strong is that we have explanations from the children and facilitators about what factor might prevent the outcome from occurring (e.g. the initial frame of mind of the children at the start of the session, states of hyperarousal, facilitator skills)
Plausibility	4	Close to a 5, but we used theory to fill some of the explanatory gaps. There is also an element of embodiment that means that a causal explanation will be hard due to the 'invisible nature' of this process.

Source: Authors' own

In the initial programme theory, we assumed that when children feel safe, they can fully immerse themselves in playing the games in a TeamUp session, and that this in turn will allow them to become relaxed in their bodies and reduce negative symptoms, which would result in children feeling themselves opening up to move and connect with other children. The evidence from the body mapping in the four locations showed a nuanced effect of TeamUp sessions on the emotions of different children. Firstly, there is strong evidence that TeamUp does indeed influence children's sensations, feelings and emotions in their bodies. For most children the before and after body maps were showing either a change in sensations and emotions, or similar sensations before and after, but children explain that these are for different reasons. Secondly, we found that these sensations and emotions were not uniformly positive or negative and that many children experienced a variety of sensations after the session. Thirdly, there is evidence of the contribution of the safety created in the TeamUp session on the sensations and emotions the children were reporting, where children felt safe with the facilitators and/or enjoyed the games that were played and therefore were able to feel relaxed in their bodies and feel happy emotions.

To interpret these findings and add nuance to the theories, we use the 'window of tolerance' model of arousal (Ogden et al., 2006). This model states that everyone has a state of physical and emotional arousal that is comfortable and within which they feel calm, which allows them to relax, connect, learn and love, which is their window of tolerance (see Figure 16). Different external inputs can push an individual outside of their window of tolerance into hyperarousal with feelings of anger, impulsivity, hypervigilance, reactivity and 'acting out' behaviours or hypoarousal with feeling numb, dissociation, defensive responses (Corrigan et al., 2011). These states are the nervous system's response to feelings of unsafety. Hyperarousal is the sympathetic nervous system's response to feeling unsafe and results in flight-fight responses and children show behaviours like screaming, swearing, hitting, disrupting and avoiding others (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020). Especially children who have experienced trauma can quickly overshoot their window of tolerance and become hyperaroused when confronted with what may be only minor disruptions. Hypoarousal is the parasympathetic nervous system response to trauma and leads to withdrawal and a freeze response where children might feel out of touch with their bodies and not sure how they are feeling (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020).

Figure 116 Window of tolerance model



Source: Authors' own adapted from (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020)

Conclusion 8: An interplay between other children, facilitation and games, contribute to children becoming hyperaroused in TeamUp

For children who reported feelings related to a hyperaroused state such as frustration, anger and upset there was usually a sense of feeling unsafe in the session that triggered these feelings. This feeling of unsafety came from the facilitators, or from other children. Boys in Location 1 entered the session in a potential hyperaroused state as they were excited because of their expectations to be playing football which was promised in the previous session. Following the session, they felt even more aroused because they were disappointed by what they ended up doing (they did not play football despite this being promised by facilitators). Their feelings changed into hyperarousal of shock, anger, sadness, surprise and disappointment which resulted in them displaying disruptive behaviours in the session by not playing seriously and perceived by other children to be cheating in the games. This can be interpreted as a break in trust, resulting in reduced sense of social safety and feeling less safe can push children out of their window of tolerance. We also found evidence that some children felt uncomfortable or hyperaroused before the session without knowing why. It is very possible that this hyperaroused state is triggered by the broader context of the AZC in which many children and their parents/caregivers feel unsafe. For these children, being in TeamUp provided them with a space where they are safe and feel safe, which moved them into their window of tolerance.

Other children entered the session within their window of tolerance, expressed by them feeling happy, calm, relaxed and joyful, mainly because they were looking forward to being in the TeamUp session, which they usually enjoy. Some children were pushed into a hyperaroused state because of other children in the session and expressed anger and frustration. We found this mainly in girls in sessions with one or more boys who display disruptive behaviours, who were either directly bullying them or were cheating in the games.

Our evidence shows that the presence of other children strongly influences the sensations and emotions that children experience in their bodies after the session, especially for girls. For girls who like coming to TeamUp and feel happy about being there at the start of the session, when there are other children who are in an hyperaroused state who disrupt the session and facilitators do not know or do not feel confident in dealing with their behaviours, these girls will feel unsafe and become angry and upset after the session. However, when there are friends present in the session with who they can play, the girls might still feel upset about the other children's behaviour, but because of their friends they will still feel safe and feel relaxation in their body.

Conclusion 9: A safe TeamUp session opens the window of tolerance

Some newer children arrived at the session in a potentially hyperaroused state, feeling nervous, excited or uncertain about what might happen and whether they will be able to understand and play the games. For these newer children, they moved from this state of hyperarousal into their window of

tolerance when: they experienced that the games they played were fun; it was clear to them what they were going to be doing; and, they expressed feeling more relaxed and happy after the TeamUp session. Facilitators highlighted the importance of structure to the session (routines and rules) to help children know what is expected of them, giving them a sense of safety and allowing them to become relaxed. This is evident especially in Location 3 where multiple newer children reported a sense of nervousness before the session and relaxation and happiness after the session. Here the facilitators are very structured in their approach to their sessions. Here they also observe that the children come to the session with a lot of energy and often leave the session calmer, which provides evidence for TeamUp allowing the children to move from a state of hyperarousal moving into window of tolerance for the children. ***Where children are new to the session and experience nervousness and excitement (hyperarousal) at the start of the session and the facilitators provide structure (i.e. enforcing rules, using the themes and routines) and children enjoy the games they play, children start to feel relaxed in their body.***

For children who arrive within their window of tolerance, many of them stayed in their window of tolerance because they enjoyed the games, had fun with their friends and were happy with the facilitators, this made them feel safe and made them feel happy and relaxed after the session. They also feel hot (from doing exercise) and energized. Our evidence shows that it is not just playing the games, but ***playing games with friends*** that contributes to a sense of relaxation in their bodies.

Our evidence also shows that children's emotions fluctuate during the session and children move in and out of hyperaroused states. Mainly from the facilitator interviews, the evidence shows that the timeout space helps the children to regulate their emotions, but mostly when the facilitator can speak to the child in their own language. Talking with the facilitator in their own language contributes to children feeling safe and helps the facilitators to be with the child and explain and talk through their emotions with them. When children feel safe they can regulate their emotions. Following on from the previous point, ***when facilitators are successfully able to help children displaying disruptive behaviours to regulate their emotions in the timeout space, these children are then more likely to move into their window of tolerance, which can in turn prevent the session from becoming unsafe for other children. This results in other children experiencing relaxation in their body during the session.***

4.4 Evidence for other outcomes: self-regulation, positive outlook, relationship skills and positive experiences are created

This impact evaluation followed a causal hotspot approach as described in section 1.2. This means that we identified specific areas in the TeamUp theory of change that became the focus. An implication of the approach is that other parts of the Theory of Change of how TeamUp contributes to increased psychosocial wellbeing were not explicitly the focus. However, the detailed case study findings do include some findings on other outcomes that are of interest to the implementation team. We include these here as the starting point for future monitoring and evaluation activities, recognizing that we did not pay particular attention to the strength of evidence of these particular findings:

Positive experiences are created: As the most immediate outcome of TeamUp, evidence from children, parents and caregivers, facilitators and COA confirmed that positive experiences are created in TeamUp. This directly links to our conclusions on embodiment. Children highlight enjoying playing games with their friends, learning new games, meeting new friends and having the opportunity to play and run around for an hour. Parents and caregivers report that their children often come back happy from TeamUp. COA confirmed that children come and go to TeamUp happily and that when TeamUp is not there (e.g. due to holidays) they always ask when TeamUp will be coming back. In two of the

four child story telling locations, the children themselves organized their own TeamUp sessions when TeamUp was not there, indicating the positive experiences that are created leading to their own replication.

Self-regulation is improved: evidence from facilitators, parents and from children indicate that TeamUp is contributing to improved self-regulation for (some) children. This happens within the sessions and across multiple sessions. Across multiple sessions, using the themes helps participating children learn to process their emotions. In particular when losing games and when other children are not playing fairly. Facilitators provided examples of children who, over time, became calmer during the TeamUp sessions, which they partly attributed to the child learning that TeamUp is a safe space where they can be themselves. Within sessions, the time out space is critical for self-regulation, especially when there are facilitators present who can speak the language of the child such that the child can make sense of what they are experiencing and why. Sometimes children also leave the session when they are feeling angry or annoyed, which also indicates self-regulatory abilities. Furthermore, the structure of the TeamUp session, including the warm up and the cooling down allows children to move through different emotional states during the TeamUp session, which helps them to regulate their emotions. The bodymapping data also evidences that children regulate their emotions by interacting with other children, especially that the presence of friends helps them to move into more relaxed states.

Positive outlook is increased. In their bodymapping, children at the start of the session illustrated that they were feeling happy in their body because they were in the TeamUp session and that they had been looking forward to it. Through their participatory research journeys, children also expressed that they look forward to TeamUp, especially for the children who are not allowed to play outside, or in the AZCs where there is not much to do. The weekly TeamUp sessions are for some children the only thing they have to look forward to. Parents and caregivers also shared that their children feel excited about the day when TeamUp is happening. As mentioned above, children often ask COA when TeamUp is happening, also indicating that they look forward to it.

Relationships are strengthened and maintained: closely linked to improved social connectedness and increased social awareness are the findings that relate to children's improved skills to build and maintain relationships. Based on the children's participatory research journeys and the facilitator interviews, we found strong evidence that through playing in TeamUp and learning about the rules in TeamUp and having these rules enforced, children increased their ability to connect with others, to support each other, to mediate conflicts and reduce aggressions and find solutions to conflicts. It was particularly interesting to find how children replicate elements from TeamUp in their own friend groups, such as making agreements and sticking to the TeamUp rules beyond the sessions.

5. Overarching conclusions

How, why and under which circumstances does TeamUp contribute to promoting the psychosocial wellbeing of children in Dutch asylum reception centres?

In the context of living in Dutch AZCs, where there is high level of unsafety and uncertainty, people from many different cultural backgrounds living together and a lack of privacy, and children who often have had experienced stressful life events, we found that TeamUp contributes to promoting psychosocial wellbeing through contributing to increased social connectedness and social awareness. It has become clear from this impact evaluation that TeamUp helps children to build and strengthen their existing resources to build their social, physical and cultural capacities that are contributing to psychosocial wellbeing. Firstly, it stands out that children increase their cultural awareness by playing

with children from different cultural backgrounds in games where they have to collaborate and play together and they learn how to interact with each other across cultures. This is an important capacity to have in a context where there are many different cultures mixing as well as an immigrant to a new culture. Therefore, TeamUp contributes to children's ability to cope with their current circumstances by building their cultural awareness.

Secondly, other research and investigations into asylum centres have shown that they can be highly stressful environments to live in for children (Pluck et al., 2022; Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, 2024; Werkgroep Kind in AZC, 2018; Zijlstra et al., 2020), and might mean that children are pushed out of their window of tolerance and experience hyper arousal. In this context, it is important for children to have places to feel safe and play. The evidence from this impact evaluation shows that TeamUp provides such a place and that in the sessions they have fun and play with friends in a safe environment, which allows children to relax and brings them back into their window of tolerance, especially when there are supportive facilitators, good friends and they play games they enjoy. Furthermore, this impact goes beyond the immediate session and our evaluation also shows that children take inspiration from TeamUp games to play with their friends and sometimes organize their own TeamUp session, where they mobilise their friends, play games and apply some of the rules they have learnt in TeamUp.

Finally, TeamUp contributes to building social connections that are important for the children to deal with the current circumstances. For shy children it is a place where they can make initial contact with their peers, which can then lead to friendships. In AZCs where there are no spaces for children to play and/or no to very little other activities, TeamUp is a place to meet their peers and to deepen their relationships and interact with other children in the AZC that they would not normally interact with. These interactions expand their social network in the centre, helping them to feel accepted and like they belong, which is an important part of psychosocial wellbeing. In the AZCs where there are regular TeamUp facilitators, children can also build strong relationships with the TeamUp facilitators, who can become an important resource for them when they have to cope with challenging situations.

6. Recommendations

In line with the collaborative nature of this impact evaluation, we have aimed to co-create recommendations for how to use the findings presented here, with the TeamUp teams. Where we have not been able to undertake a recommendation co-creation process, we have developed a set of consideration questions offered to relevant teams to use as they think through the implications of the evaluation findings. We have grouped these recommendations into three levels of recommendations: Strategic (e.g. in relation to where and when to implement TeamUp and strategic questions around scaling and scope), intervention design and intervention implementation. For each we list the most relevant findings, consideration questions and then include either recommendations co-created with the team or from the external evaluation team.

Strategic recommendations

Most relevant findings:

- In AZCs where there are other activities, spaces to play, and other children to meet, TeamUp plays a role in providing additional opportunities for children to meet peers, strengthening the impact of school and other activities in forming social connections. TeamUp is part of a broader ecosystem contributing to social connectedness.
- In AZCs where there are less opportunities for children to make and maintain peer relationships, because it is unsafe, or because there are no other places to play, or there are no children their age, TeamUp plays the biggest role in providing participating children with opportunity to play, make friends and form social connections. This is especially the case if there are a few other opportunities to continue to connect (e.g. if there is a playground).
In AZCs where there is nothing else for children to do and they rarely leave their rooms (because of unsafety), TeamUp's effect on social connectedness is minimal given its design of being only one hour a week.

Questions to consider when thinking about strategic direction for TeamUp:

1. Given what we know about the relative effectiveness of TeamUp as one intervention within the AZC ecosystem, what does this mean for where you implement TeamUp and how you might think about scaling?
2. What are your thoughts on adapting the design based on the different AZC contexts?

Recommendations from the Netherlands TeamUp team (2 April 2024)

- In locations where TeamUp is the only activity on offer, increase the frequency of TeamUp to multiple times a week which is likely to increase effectiveness as children will have the opportunity to see each other more frequently.
- In emergency locations where children might not be going to school (yet), provide TeamUp here and understand it as a way for children to interact and meet their peers before they have that opportunity at school.

Evaluation team recommendations

- Strategically focus TeamUp implementation in AZC locations with a dearth of activities and child-friendly spaces, thus increasing the potential for impact on these specific children. In these AZCs, however, because of the lack of opportunity to engage with their peers outside TeamUp sessions, increase the frequency of TeamUp sessions might be necessary to ensure its effectiveness.
- Before deciding to implement TeamUp in a new AZC location, pay careful attention to all the contextual conditions highlighted in the findings, and run a readiness assessment in order to consider a tailored design that will maximize impact from the intervention (such as suggested in the previous bullet point).
- In any scaling considerations, pay careful attention to the contextual conditions that make up the ecosystem within which TeamUp will be implemented and consider the implications of transferring the intervention into similar or different contexts.

Intervention design recommendations

Relevant findings:

- The conclusions from this impact evaluation confirm the intervention design: when the structure, rules, routines, themes etc are well implemented, then there is a stronger effect especially on developing social awareness. Same place, same face provides safety for the children because of the predictability and strengthened social connectedness with facilitators.
- In AZCs where it was harder to implement these structures of TeamUp (e.g. because of the group dynamics from the AZC entering the TeamUp session) TeamUp is still a place for children to have fun and more immediate outcomes (e.g. positive experiences being recreated) are still achieved.
- Non-verbal nature/use of language: when things are explained verbally (e.g. emotions when children are in timeout or games when children need to play with each other) outcomes around emotional regulation and social awareness are strengthened as opposed to a strict non-verbal implementation. Cognitive processing of what happens through language seems to reinforce emotional experiences and could potentially enhance effectiveness.
- Role of parents: many parents who participated in the MSC process were not familiar with TeamUp, yet their encouragement and permission for children to attend was found to impact attendance. Further, parents who perceive TeamUp as a safe space for their children, will permit children to attend, even when they find the rest of the AZC too unsafe to allow their child to play outside.

Questions to consider when thinking about strategic direction for TeamUp:

3. How might the findings on use of language in strengthening the outcomes influence any adaptations to your intervention design?

4. How can you strengthen the role of parents in TeamUp?

Recommendations co-created with Netherlands TeamUp team (2 April 2024):

- In facilitator training, explain clearly the reason why the structures are so important (e.g. that through the warmup and explaining the rules it can help children who arrive in an hyperaroused state to move into their window of tolerance and relax) and encourage facilitators to implement them as much as possible.
- Ensuring that there are 4 facilitators in each location, but especially in those locations where there is more of a street culture in the AZC that tends to infiltrate the TeamUp session, this will help to ensure that TeamUp becomes a mental health and psychosocial support intervention and is not 'just playing with children' (even though the latter still produces positive outcomes for the children).
- Mobilisation should be a moment where the facilitators explain to the (especially new) parents what TeamUp is and what their child is going to be doing. During the facilitator training, facilitators can develop an elevator pitch of what TeamUp is, that they can then use during mobilisation.
- Have flyers, information posters and other information sources (e.g. videos) available to share with new parents who arrive in the AZC. This requires coordination with COA, which can be challenging as parents already get a lot of information when they newly arrive in the AZC.

Evaluation team recommendations:

- The evidence shows clearly that consistency in facilitation teams is critical to the effectiveness of TeamUp. Establishing both strong relationships with the children and with each other is important for TeamUp to have the desired effects, and, perhaps even more importantly to minimise potential negative effects. This suggests that investing in longer term facilitators, potentially through extending the paid facilitator model that is currently being piloted (dependent on results of that pilot).
- The evidence also shows that quality facilitation is crucial for effectiveness of TeamUp. This includes facilitators being equipped to manage the group dynamics that result from the 'street culture' within the AZCs and to be able to implement a quality TeamUp session. The findings from the upcoming process evaluation will be informative to help develop further recommendations about this.
- Evidence from the facilitators and children indicates that the emotional processes and the subsequent outcomes resulting from TeamUp happen because of the use of language. This suggests that having at least one facilitator who can speak one or more languages of the participating children would be beneficial.

- In response to the need for both consistency and language coverage, recruitment of more facilitators from the AZC could build stronger relationships between the local facilitator and participating children as it is likely that they will speak at least one of the languages of the children.

Intervention implementation recommendations

Recap of key findings:

- When there are other children displaying disruptive behaviours in a TeamUp session, and their behaviours are not managed well by facilitators, it contributes to other children becoming hyperaroused and not feeling safe in the session. Being in a state of hyperarousal contributes to children receiving less benefits from TeamUp. Hyperarousal can also be reduced when their friends are in the session and they feel safe with their friends.

Questions for consideration:

5. How might the use of window of tolerance model and deeper reflections on embodiment help you train and mentor facilitators?
6. How can you embed learning on the interplay between group dynamics and individuals' emotions when training and mentoring facilitators?

Recommendations co-created with Netherlands TeamUp team (2 April 2024):

- As an implementing team, have a yearly 'APK' for each location: a moment to reflect on how TeamUp is functioning within this AZC. Within this, reflect on how TeamUp is functioning, but also what are the contextual conditions (e.g. what other activities are happening, safety of the AZC, group dynamics, cultural background and age of the children) that may have changed in this AZC that may require a different approach to TeamUp (e.g. the day it takes place, the number of times it takes place, how long the sessions are).
- Facilitators play an active role in supporting children to co-regulate their emotions, whilst ensuring that we are in line with staying a level 2 MHPSS intervention: focusing on the here and now of their emotions. This can happen on three levels: 1) facilitator to go over to child in Timeout and sit with them to give them special attention; 2) using pictograms or bodymapping to help the child share what they are feeling and reflect on this; 3) if the facilitator can speak the same language as the child, talk through with the child what they are feeling and why. This can be included in the training and mentoring for facilitators on how to approach children in Timeout.

Evaluation team recommendations

- The evidence suggest that when younger and older children are in one group, the older children dominate the session and the younger children become more withdrawn. Splitting up the groups into age groups that are more similar could avoid this negative group dynamic.

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Annexes

A1. Quality of evidence rubrics

Across academic literature and evaluation practice, many different quality criteria exist of what makes ‘good’ qualitative, participatory and case-based approaches to evaluation. The field of assessing quality in these evaluation approaches remains contested¹⁰. In the proposal to TeamUp, we proposed use of Tom Aston and Marina Apgar’s work on quality criteria for case-based and qualitative evaluation approaches (Thomas Aston, 2020)¹¹. The ‘quality of evidence rubrics’ are used to assess the quality of evidence that underpins the causal claims and the narrative of change resulting from the evaluation. A rubric is a form of qualitative scale that denotes a standard of performance across multiple criteria. They explain what the standard means (using qualitative descriptors) and make clear the reasoning behind an assessment. It helps us to go beyond just ascribing a number or rating evidence as good/bad, but instead pushes us to critically reflect on our evidence quality. The rubric will help us make our rating of quality of our evidence clear.

During the inception workshop in Den Haag on 10-12 May 2023, we explored with the full evaluation team and users (including the regional coordinators, MEL, Team Lead, Quality and Development Coordinator, Head of Domestic Programmes Department and the TeamUp Global Team) what criteria we collectively value and should drive our understanding of quality. The group explored multiple possible criteria and agreed that Plausibility and Uniqueness are important. Plausibility is the foundation of quality in causal inference in general. Uniqueness was considered important because it will help focus on a core question of the team, which is to understand the ‘magic spark’ that TeamUp contributes to its participants – to understand in specifically what ways TeamUp creates change. Further, the interest in understanding contributing to social connectedness also requires a detailed understanding of specific contribution. Representativeness was also identified as important, which emphasizes that the voices of the children are included, as well as of others who see the children everyday (e.g. their parents/caregivers, COA staff). This criterion aligns with the values of TeamUp and the evaluation team. Lastly, triangulation was identified as an important criterion, to ensure that across our multiple methods and lines of evidence from multiple sources, we can make the most of rich qualitative data to build confidence in our conclusions.

What follows is a short description and the rubric for each of these four chosen criteria of: 1) plausibility; 2) representativeness; 3) triangulation and 4) uniqueness. After their description is the first application of the rubrics as the design is being finalised, to ensure that methodological choices are contributing to quality overall.

The plan is to again use these rubrics during the collective analysis moments at the end of the first round of data collection and the second (and last) round of data collection. Using them at the end of the first round of data collection will give us additional information on where our evidence might be weak and where we want to collect further data to strengthen our evidence in round 2. Using the rubrics at the end of round 2 means that we can use the outcome of the assessment when

¹⁰ See Jenni Downes and Amy Gullickson’s (2020) paper on what **validity** currently means in the field of program evaluation. They reviewed 121 articles and narrowed this down to 45 different criteria for validity.

¹¹ See Aston, T (2020) Quality of Evidence Rubrics. <https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tom-aston-consulting-quality-of-evidence-rubrics-activity-6736598045133164544-mfkZ/> which has been used in developing training material on strength of evidence delivered by UKES and a bespoke course for the World Bank’s IEG.

communicating the evidence and potentially provide TeamUp with areas for further research and evaluation.

A1.1 Plausibility

The narrative of change should be plausible, meaning that it should provide a clear and logical thread that follows the data. The evaluation study should clearly present how TeamUp and the outcomes are associated with each other, the narrative must have key steps and clearly explain the relationship between TeamUp and the changes. The changes should be clear (e.g. what changed, who changed their behaviour, when and where this change happened) and the timing of this change needs to make sense in relation to when TeamUp took place or when the participants participated in TeamUp. Claims of contribution and effect should be reasonable, and conclusions drawn should clearly follow the data.

Table A1.1 Plausibility Rubric

1	2	3	4	5
Unclear, illogical, or contradictory explanation connecting TeamUp to outcome.	Explanation indicates a possible connection between TeamUp and outcome.	Explanation is clear, logical, and temporally consistent, and suggests a likely association between TeamUp and outcome.	Convincing explanation of how evidence connects TeamUp and outcome. Conclusions drawn tend to follow the data.	Highly convincing account, clearly and logically signposting key steps and specific data connecting TeamUp to outcome. Conclusions drawn unambiguously follow the data.

Source: Adapted Tom Aston (2020)

A1.2 Representativeness

Representativeness refers to the extent to which the voices of those targeted by and involved in the intervention are central in the evidence that is presented about how the intervention works and how they have participated in the different parts of the process that has generated the evidence (design, data gathering, analysis, presenting). TeamUp stakeholders include children, parents/caregivers, facilitators and COA staff members. TeamUp focuses on improving outcomes for children primarily, it is important that **their voices are central** in the evidence that we gather and use in the evaluation.

Representativeness is highest when the evidence is generated directly from participants through processes that they have a high level of agency over, e.g. where they have initiated or designed their own evidence gathering processes or are closely involved in the analysis and sense making of the evidence. Given the participants are not a homogenous group, their unique viewpoints might be contradictory because if it truly reflects individuals' viewpoints that are generated through their own processes, we don't assume that they all agree with each other.

Table A1.2 Representativeness Rubric

1	2	3	4	5
Evidence does not include the	Evidence about views/experience	Evidence about the views/	Evidence comes directly from the	Evidence directly from all

views of children or other TeamUp stakeholders.	s of some children but they have not been involved or asked about this, for example through indirect sources (e.g. another stakeholder talking about children's experiences).	experiences of children where they have been directly gathered through processes driven by other stakeholders' observations. Children or other stakeholders are not involved in analysis.	children and other stakeholders. Other stakeholders were involved in the analysis, but not children. Viewpoints are more aggregated (combined) rather than unique.	stakeholders with high levels of participants' agency in the research process, analysis and sharing. May contain contradictory views that represent unique viewpoints from different groups.
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Source: Authors' own

A1.3 Triangulation

Triangulation is a common quality criterion for qualitative research and relates to bringing multiple sources and lines of evidence together. Bringing together data from different sources and lines of evidence can help to control bias and ensure a degree of consistency. **Multiple lines of evidence** refer to seeking out multiple perspectives from different stakeholders that can support the narrative of change and can help check the credibility of this narrative. **Multiple data sources** refer to different methods through which the data are generated, e.g. through observations, outcome harvesting, in-depth interviews, focus groups, meeting documentation, case reports.

As with other participatory evaluations, proximity and confirmation biases are likely in this TeamUp impact evaluation¹², as we and our participants might be biased towards developing causal explanations about our efforts rather than where there may actually be observed changes based on our data. Ensuring that we underpin our change narrative with evidence that comes from multiple stakeholders and is collected through multiple methods will help us to reduce this bias. We should aim for at least level 3 in this rubric.

Table A1.3. Triangulation Rubric

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence corroborates the connection between intervention and outcome. Other evidence contradicts the proposed connection.	A single line of evidence from a single source^ supports the claim.	Multiple lines^ of evidence from a single source corroborate the connection between intervention and outcome.	Multiple lines of evidence from multiple sources corroborate the connection between intervention and outcome.	Multiple lines of high-quality* evidence from multiple sources corroborate the connection between intervention and outcome.

¹² Wadeson, A. Monzani, B. and Aston, T. (2020). "Process Tracing as a Practical Evaluation Method: Comparative Learning from Six Evaluations," available at: <https://mande.co.uk/2020/media-3/unpublished-paper/process-tracing-as-a-practical-evaluation-method-comparative-learning-from-six-evaluations/>

Source: Adapted from Aston (2020)

* high-quality might refer to that it directly relates to the contribution story that is generated.

^ source = the person(s) who provided the evidence. Lines = evidenced produced through different methods

A1.4 Uniqueness

We need to know how good the connection is between TeamUp and the change(s) that we are observing, which we can do by looking at the uniqueness of the connection between the intervention and the change (i.e. “the distinctiveness of effect patterns”¹³ or “specificity of association”¹⁴). We can do this by exploring alternative explanations and trying to rule out that there are other factors that may have caused the outcome. The more specific our collected evidence is to the link between TeamUp and the outcomes, the stronger our claims can be.

Uniqueness can help reduce Type 1 errors, that an unseen variable affects the changes of the dependent variable. Uniqueness translates to the level of confidence we have in our proposed narrative of change (hypothesis).

Table A1.4. Uniqueness Rubric

1	2	3	4	5
The evidence does not include any specific information about TU or other contextual conditions that contribute to the outcome.	The evidence provides some connection between TU and the outcomes but doesn't explore the contextual conditions as part of the explanation.	The evidence provides good exploration of the contextual conditions that support or prevent the outcomes from emerging but does not provide specific explanation for the role that TU plays in the process of change.	The evidence provides a clear explanation for the specific role that TU plays in contributing to outcomes, as well as an explanation of other contextual factors that also contribute.	The evidence provides a clear and high-quality explanation for the specific role that TU plays in contributing to outcomes, as well as an explanation of other contextual factors that contribute as well as what might prevent the outcome.

Source: Adapted based on Tom Aston (2020)

¹³ Scriven, M. (2008). “A Summative Evaluation of RCT Methodology: & An Alternative Approach to Causal Research,” Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation, Vol. 5, No. 9.

¹⁴ Norris, R. Nichols, S. Ransom, G. Liston, P. Barlow, A. Mugodo, J. (2008). “Causal Criteria Methods Manual: Methods for Applying the Multiple Lines and Levels of Evidence (MLLE) Approach for Addressing Questions of Causality.”

A2. Data collection tools

A2.1 Prompts children's stories

1) Who are the people in your life that are important to you? *If you like you can draw this 1) for instance like a flower, where the petals represent people you turn to for support and/or play with, size represents the importance of the people; 2) draw a network map; or 3) a free flowing drawing.*

2) Your story of making friends in this AZC

Indicative Story Questions	
Prompt Questions to start with	Can you tell me about your first day in this AZC?
	Tell me about the people who you have met since your first day in this AZC?
	There are people and children from many countries here, can you share how you made contact with them?
	Can you tell me about a nice memory you have in this AZC?
	How do you spend your free time?
	Can you tell me about what a typical day looks like for you in this AZC?
	Can you tell me about activities that you do with other children in the AZC? Are there any activities that are organized here at the AZC that you participate in?
Encouraging Questions	Can you tell me more?
	Tell me what happened?
	What happened after that?
Clarifying Questions	You said that you made many friends. Can you tell me more about these friends?
	You mentioned [<i>your brother</i>], can you tell me more about [<i>your brother</i>] and your relationship with him
	You said you sometimes play with, can you tell me more about how you met this friend?
Deepening Questions	Why was that?
	Who was involved in that with you?
	Can you tell me exactly what happened?
	Did this happen in a certain place? Can you describe it?
	How did that make you feel?
	Can you give me an example?
	Did you have any choice? / did you decide this yourself

A2.2 Most Significant Change template

1. Tell me a little about yourself and how you heard about TeamUp? How often does your child go to TeamUp? When did they start going to TeamUp?
2. How was your child connecting with others when you first arrived in this AZC?
3. How is your child now in terms of interacting with others?
4. Can you list any changes you have seen in how your child interacts with others or makes friends since you arrived in this AZC?

5. You have described a number of changes you have seen in your child [*repeat this list of changes the parent/caregiver has told you*] , of these changes which one would you like to tell me more about?

Or, do any of these changes particularly stand out to you?

Or, when you think about your child since you moved in here, is there a moment that you felt that their interactions with other children was different?

Or, can you remember an example of a particular change you have seen in your child in relation to how they make friends?

Or, which of these changes do you think is most important for your child?

6. Can you describe in detail what this change has been in your child?

Optional Prompts and follow up questions you might want to use to help the parent/caregiver describe the change:

- *Beginning: how was your child acting/behaving/feeling/interacting with people before the change happened? Before TeamUp / When we first arrived in the AZC... /*
- *The Change: How is your child acting/behaving/feeling now?*
- *The pathway between the beginning and now: tell me about what happened between the starting point and now? How and why did your child change in this way?*
- *Can you tell me more?*
- *Tell me what happened?*
- *What happened after that?*
- *Why was that?*
- *Can you tell me exactly what happened?*
- *Did this happen in a certain place? Can you describe it?*
- *Can you give me an example?*

7. Why did you choose this change in particular? Why was this change significant for you?

8. What do you think TeamUp's role is in this change in your child?

To help the parent/caregiver answer this question if they are less familiar with TeamUp, you can also ask for example:

- *How do you think that playing with children from other cultures is influencing your child's behaviour?*

- *How do you think that having a regular weekly play session is influencing your child*

it is helpful to break this down into specifics of teamup and interrogate what they think the role of this is on how their child is changing – for example think about the playing and moving element, the interaction with other children, the same time-same place-same face element, their relationship with the facilitators etc... How do these specific TeamUp elements play a role in the change that the parent/caregiver has just described.

9. You had listed more changes you have seen in your child, would you like to tell the story about any of the other changes?

Changes in children's social connectedness we can think about/ask about:

- Are they more prosocial?
- Are they less aggressive, verbally and/or physically?
- Are they making friends?
- Are they keeping friends?
- Do they feel supported by others?
- Do they support others (friends, parents, siblings)?
- Do they try to find solutions to conflicts?
- Do they feel like they belong?
- Do they invite other children to join/play with them and others?
- Do they play with others?
- Do they adapt their play to include others?
- Do they play with children from other cultures?
- Do they work together with other children?
- Do they pick up other children for TeamUp sessions or other activities?
- Do they turn to their parents for support more or less?

A2.3 Interview questions TeamUp facilitators

Introductory questions

1. How long have you been a facilitator?
2. How are you finding this so far?
3. What's your favourite thing about being a facilitator?

Facilitator's perspective on children's experiences

4. Based on what you see in the sessions, what do you think is the biggest benefit children get from TeamUp?
5. Do you see any differences between how different children engage in the sessions? (e.g. based on their gender, whether they are more shy or outgoing or those who are newer to the centre)

Sense of safety and embodiment

6. How safe do you think children feel within the TeamUp sessions?
7. How does this compare to the overall safety of the centre do you think?
8. As you probably know, TeamUp is about playing together, but we think that when the children feel safe and they are physically playing, this allows them to get in touch with themselves more, including their emotions, and to learn to regulate their emotions – Do you think this happens?

Connections with others and other changes in children

9. How do you think playing physical games together with other children helps them to connect with each other?
10. When you are doing the sessions, do you see any changes in children's attitudes or behaviours between when they came in and when they leave?
 - a. Why do you think these changes happen/don't happen

A2.4 Interview questions COA contact person

1. Kan je me wat meer vertellen over wat je doet in het AZC?
2. Wat denk jij dat TeamUp bijdraagt voor de kinderen die meedoen?
3. Welke andere activiteiten zijn er voor kinderen in het AZC?
4. Hoe veiling denk je dat kinderen zich voelen in het AZC?
5. In deze context van veiligheid in de AZC en andere activiteiten, wat voor rol speelt Team Up?
6. Van onze data uit Hoogeveen, maar ook andere lokaties leren we dat waar er weining andere dingen te doen zijn en weinig ruimte is, TeamUp vooral een rol speelt, hoe is dit in Hoogeveen?
7. Welke rol speelt TeamUp in het integreren van kinderen van verschillende culturen?

A2.5 Body map template



A3. Quality assessment of methods in design phase

Method	Plausibility	Representativeness	Uniqueness
Case studies of children			
Body mapping	In order to understand how embodiment works and produce plausible narratives of change for children this method is critical.	The method supports deep exploration of children's experience, supporting this core group's representativeness in the evidence base.	This method is perhaps the most important for finding the 'magic spark' of TU given the embodiment is one of the features that makes it unique as an approach to psychosocial wellbeing and unlike other interventions in the AZCs.
Children's data collection	This method is not necessarily going to provide explanation of how change has happened in social-connectedness.	As a fun activity the children are likely to feel more involved in the evaluation supporting overall representativeness in the case study material.	This method is less likely to show unique TU contribution.
Interviews with children	The interviews are likely to help fill any gaps around plausibility by providing evaluator directed questioning.	This method will contribute the least to representativeness.	As a gap filling method this could support identifying uniqueness in an intentional way.
Facilitator observations	Complementing other methods, the facilitator's observations could provide a richer picture for plausibility.	Representativeness of facilitator's interpretations of children's experience is not as important as children's views but will support use of findings.	Facilitators might have a sense of what the 'magic spark' is but will be from their own experience alone.
Other methods			
Story collection and analysis	The causal analysis will explicitly provide detailed information about the steps in the pathway to social connectedness. The high number of stories will add to the plausibility of these claims.	Involving children in the analysis will provide strong representativeness to the evidence generated.	Unlikely to reveal uniqueness in a specific way because the question it responds to is broader than TU by definition.
Interviews with facilitators, COA and RCs	Realist interviews will support plausibility by explicitly seeking to fill gaps in the causal pathways uncovered through the other methods.	This is the least representative method of all as it is an evaluator driven exercise.	Realist interviews can dig deep to identify uniqueness if it remains opaque through other methods.

Most Significant Change with parents/caregivers	Including a causal analysis within the MSC process will provide useful details for plausibility.	As the only method that will work with parents/caregivers explicitly, it will provide a particular aspect of representativeness that no other method can.	If uniqueness is informing the analysis process – so seeking to understand contribution and probing around TU, then the method could support this criterion (this could drive the analysis away from the participant driven definition of significance).
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A4. Changes identified by parents/caregivers

Table A4.1 Changes related to social connectedness

Friends with children from other cultures	13
Has become more social / plays more with other children /	11
Closed up socially	8
Has friends now	7
Began communicating with foreign children	6
Increased tolerance of children from other cultures	2
Has built positive relationships with teachers	1
Understands parents better	1
Feels like a role model to younger siblings	1
Adapted to different cultures	1
Communicates more / improved communication skills	1
Friends with children from different ages	1
Learnt to deal with rough children	1
Talks with other people	1
Overcame sense of foreignness	1

Source: Authors' own

Table A4.2 Changes related to emotions

Became calmer and more relaxed	5
Became violent / aggressive	4
Feeling comfortable expressing/increased confidence	4
Has become ruder	3
Gets angry easier	2
Has become more mature (also because learnt things that he/she should not learn yet)	2
Has become more nervous	2
Is no longer afraid of loud music or noises	2
Became more irritable	1
Has become more afraid	1
Has become less afraid	1
Stands up for herself more	1
Has become able to regulate emotions	1
Has become more defensive	1
Has become sad because misses their parents	1
Has become wiser and calmer	1
Is happy	1
Mood has improved	1
Has become mature	1

Self-discovery through empathy	1
Self-acceptance	1
Developed sense of empathy	1

Source: Authors' own

Table A4.3 Changes in abilities, attitudes and behaviours

Speaks (more) Dutch	17
Accepted stay in the Netherlands	3
Loves going to school	3
Became more active to do things independently	2
Discovered abilities with TeamUp	2
Learning independence and being social, makes him free	2
Started learning bad words	1
Grown up faster because not able to play as a child	1
Less sporty	1
Learnt other languages	1
Increased understanding of their situation	1
Integrating in the centre	1
Has become used to the situation	1
Asking why?	1
Overcame fear of security personnel	
Able to distinguish right from wrong	1
Has become more daring	1

Source: Authors' own

A5. Methodological considerations

Limitations:

- All the children in our sample were here with their parents. We decided to exclude unaccompanied minors from the sample for this impact evaluation and only focus on family, emergency and 'normal' AZC locations to allow for the results to be more easily transferable.
- The initial plan was to do two sessions of body maps in each location. Due logistics and time constraints we ended up doing only 1 set of body maps in most locations, except for Zutphen. This meant that the bodymaps data are very much a specific situation snapshot of that particular TeamUp session.
- It was a challenge to recruit parents for the return visit of the MSC process, where they were asked to rank the changes in other stories. Because of this, in some of the locations on one or two parents attended the sessions. This was because they were no longer interested in it, or because they were busy with something else. This meant that we could not fulfil the process of MSC as we had initially planned and therefore needed to undertake the causal analysis ourselves.
- While our initial design was to analyse Round 1 data and assess the quality of evidence of this data to then inform Round 2, due to time constraints of the impact evaluation, we were not able to do this to this extent. Round 2 data was nonetheless adapted based on experiences of Round 1 (e.g. number of locations was reduced due to our experience with the logistics involved in multiple locations).
- The participatory methods that were used in this evaluation require facilitation skills. The data collectors that were recruited did not have these skills to begin with as they had not done this kind of work before. They did learn quickly on the job and because of their personal situation and their commitment to and enthusiasm for the work were able to undertake good quality data collection. However, the quality of the data could have been improved if they were collected by more trained participatory facilitators. However, TeamUp now has a team of highly skilled and motivated research assistants that it could employ for other projects using participatory research methods.

Strengths and potentials for TeamUp MEAL:

- The bodymapping process was experienced as a good method to capture the emotions of children. This method allowed the children to express nuanced emotions in different parts of their body. We were able to capture changes in their emotions and it served as a good starting point for further reflections with the children. The children also seemed to enjoy doing the colouring. It is also an activity that is relatively easy to include in a TeamUp session as part of the opening and closing of the session. To ongoingly monitor children's emotional responses to the TeamUp session, we can suggest this to be included in the MEAL toolkit.

- The participatory research journey was well received by the children and they generally enjoyed their booklets. We believe we found a good balance between giving the children a voice and an opportunity to share and research what they thought is important and what data was required to answer the evaluation question. There were great examples of children using their booklets for their own research (e.g. asking other children in the AZC what their favourite activity is, research the home country of their friends, understanding the activities that are happening in TeamUp, interviewing their friends about their experiences with TeamUp). They also used it as a space to reflect on the TeamUp session directly after the sessions took place and they completed the other questions in the booklet too. The reflection sessions afterwards provided the children with an opportunity to share first what they thought was important. We believe that this allowed them to share reflections on TeamUp that were both positive and more critical reflections. Again, this is a method that TeamUp can potentially continue to use in their MEAL system.
- The data collectors who were refugees themselves and TeamUp facilitators were essential for this evaluation. Their in-depth knowledge of the intervention as well as of life in the AZC made the data collection possible. Their ability to establish quick rapport with many participants because they could communicate in their own language made especially the story-based approaches possible, as these approaches rely heavily on trust between the participant and data collector.