Omdat hun hart sprak. Geschiedenis van de georganiseerde hulp aan Joodse kinderen in Nederlands, 1942-1945
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English summary

The indignation which arose in Amsterdam and Utrecht in the middle of 1942, as a result of the German authorities in the Netherlands giving the order to proceed to the large-scale deportation of Jews from Amsterdam, was translated into action by a small number of mainly young people. Thus four resistance groups came into being, known after the war by the names Utrechts Kindercomité [Utrecht Child Committee], Amsterdamse Studenten Groep [Amsterdam Students' Group], Naamloze Vennootschap [Anonymus Association], and Trouwgroep [Trouw Group]. The first two groups were originally mostly made up of students. The members of the last two were mostly from the Dutch Reformed Church. These groups were determined to transport Jewish children by train to foster families outside Amsterdam. They also provided ration cards and, if necessary, clothing, footwear and payment for board to these foster families. In this way an estimated 974 Jewish children and 126 Jewish adults escaped deportation during the years 1942-1945. Of these, 3.5% were discovered, arrested and subsequently murdered. This work is known to history as 'kinderwerk' [children's work]. Those who carried out this work are known as 'kinderwerkers' [children's workers].

Since 1815, the Netherlands had never known the need to resist the government. Now, suddenly, illegal organizations had to be set up, something which took time. The deportations, on the other hand, were very well-prepared. The head start which the Nazis had over the children's workers was thus very great, as is shown by the fact that in the first ten months that the children's work existed (July 1942 - April 1943) only 32 percent of the above-mentioned 1100 Jews were taken into hiding. During the same period 56 percent of the total number of deportees were gassed. At the time it was the students from Utrecht and Amsterdam who were able to react the fastest to the deportations, thanks to the fact that they originated in student organizations. The Naamloze Vennootschap and the Trouwgroep had to start from scratch. During the period in question they were not yet in a position to save many Jewish children.

By the beginning of May 1943 the children's workers had their organizations in order. At the same time the readiness in the countryside to take people into hiding was growing and the motivation for Jewish parents to surrender their children had also greatly increased. These three factors resulted in a boom in the children's work: in the five months May-September 1943 more than 54 percent of the 1100 Jews were taken into hiding. The Utrecht students played only a very small part in this, however; their progress had been halted as a result of the fatal consequences of a failed attack on two people in a country house in the North Brabant town of Esch who were suspected of treachery.

By the end of September 1943 the deportations had to all intents and purposes ceased, although transports still left the Westerbork transit camp until
September 1944. The remaining 13 percent of the total of 1100 Jews consisted of those who had been in hiding already and who had got into difficulties at their safe houses. The four groups took these people over. The Naamloze Vennootschap turned out to be the most successful in searching out Jewish children who had got into difficulties this way.

When we look at the period July 1942 - September 1943 as a whole, we can see that the tragedy of the children's work lies in the fact that at the moment the four groups began to function in the way in which the children's workers wished it to, the majority of the Dutch Jews had already been murdered. Thus it was mainly the Jewish children who had been 'gesperd' (exempted from transportation until further notice) who were provided with a place in hiding. For them postponement really meant cancellation.

The majority of the Jewish children affected were taken to the provinces of Limburg and Friesland. Extensive 'branches' were set up in these provinces, such as a centre in and around Tienray (Limburg), where 123 Jews were taken care of. Hundreds of children were brought to the Friesian towns of Sneek and Leeuwarden, too. The Naamloze Vennootschap had its most important base in South Limburg, and by the end of September 1943 roughly two hundred Jews were hidden there. All in all the children's workers recruited 3300 to 4400 safe houses.

For a whole year the children's workers also tried to independently finance their work. To this end they travelled (with varying success) throughout the country in search of ration cards, and they visited factories asking for money and goods. From the summer of 1943 on, the greater part of the funding could be handed over to the renowned national organizations which had grown up in the meantime, such as the Landelijke Organisatie voor hulp aan ondervinders (LO) [The National Organization for help for people in hiding]. After September 1943, the Trouwgroep began to devote itself entirely to the distribution network of the resistance newspaper Trouw.

I have investigated the profile of the children who were in hiding, and that of the people who took care of them at the safe house where they stayed the longest (main address). I have not been able to commit myself on this point because my data have not produced a representative random sample. The profile of the children concerned is as follows: they were exempted until further notice, they lived in Amsterdam before going into hiding, they were younger than six years old, and, less certain, they came from a family with an average income.

The foster parents at the main address can be characterized as follows: they were good to the Jewish children entrusted to them, they were asked by the children's workers, they were village people, they were Dutch Reformed or Catholic, and, less certain, they enjoyed an average income. I should like to add that more than 30 percent of them were childless but not by choice, an exceptional over-representation given the fact that at the time the national average was 10 percent. An explanation for this phenomenon is not hard to find.