

To all those who, as young people, were directly affected, and to their parents, friends, family and bereaved:

Today we, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, the Ministry of Justice and Security, the Dutch Youth Care Sector Association (Jeugdzorg Nederland) and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten, VNG), apologise to all of the young people who suffered in a secure youth care institution or in a young offender institution on the basis of a court order under civil law.

For many of you, life in a secure youth care institution was rigid and oppressive. During your stay, many of you were confronted with an extreme manner in which measures that restricted your individual freedom, were applied, such as being placed in solitary confinement or having to sleep there at night, being subjected to aggressive holds and restraint methods or pain-inducing techniques. You were strip searched or required to take contraceptives. Too little attention was paid to what you had been through and especially what you needed from the secure youth care services or within the young offender institution. In addition, many young people had insufficient access to appropriate education during their stay. We were unable to offer you sufficient protection and appropriate care, and that left deep scars that have yet to heal.

We find it appalling that you felt unheard, powerless, confused and lonely. And we are sorry that any expression of those feelings in these institutions could well have resulted in additional restrictions of your liberty. The response to the signs of problems fell short. There was too much emphasis on limiting your freedom, and as a result you were not always given the care you truly needed. This strict and oppressive treatment made you feel as if you were being punished and left to fend for yourself. Measures that were intended as protection caused many of you harm and trauma. Many of you feel that it was your own fault. To you we want to say: 'It wasn't your fault. You should have been able to count on being in a safe environment and to receive good, loving care in the secure youth care institution or young offender institution where you were placed.'

To the parents, families and bereaved: We offer our apologies for the suffering your child endured in a secure youth care institution and for the emotional scars left by the experience. We are sorry that many children did not receive the protection, warmth, connection and appropriate help they needed and deserved.

As policymakers, implementing agencies and supervisory authorities, we are jointly responsible for a well-functioning youth care system and the services and care needed to provide appropriate and sufficient assistance. All young people have a right to expect the safe environment and care they need to grow and develop, including those living in a secure youth care institution. Together we failed to provide young people with a place of safety and proper care.

We want to take responsibility for what went wrong in these institutions. We hope that this apology, as an initial step towards actions aimed at acknowledgement and recovery, will help ease the suffering of those directly affected. We are working with people with lived experience to facilitate activities aimed at acknowledgement and recovery. These activities will focus on bringing people together, both online and offline, so that you know you are part of a community and you aren't alone. So that you can share your experiences and find solace in them. We are also looking into how process guidance can help those who were placed in institutions and who are now seriously struggling as a result. Starting today, you can visit the website www.nagesloten.nl.

The Youth Care Sector Association, the VNG and central government will re-examine our agreements from 2024 concerning the phasing out of secure institutionalised youth care and the transition to new forms of youth care. This process is ongoing and includes effective safeguards for the legal status of young people. We are working on changing the sector so that professionals are better equipped to provide appropriate care. We are bringing an end to secure institutionalised youth care, but the process takes time and must be done with due care.

With this apology, we acknowledge the suffering and our shared responsibility in providing a safe place and appropriate, loving care, with a sense of closeness and a focus on recovery and prospects for the future. You were entrusted to our care, and it is therefore our responsibility to take you seriously and to continue listening to you.

To all those who as young people were placed in secure youth care institutions and suffered as a result, and to their parents, friends, families and bereaved: we are sorry. This never should have happened to you.

Minister of Long-term Care, Youth and Sport, Mirjam Sterk
Minister for Legal Protection and Prisons, Claudia van Bruggen
Chair of the Youth Care Sector Association, Ahmed Aboutaleb
For the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, Dennis de Vries

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