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**'Placement of young people together
in custodial institutions'
(Samenplaatsing van jongeren in
justitiële inrichtingen)**

SUMMARY

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Summary

The aim of the study entitled 'Placement of young people together in custodial institutions' (*Samenplaatsing van jongeren in justitiële inrichtingen*) was to find out what the experiences are among young people who have been placed together in custodial youth institutions on the grounds of civil and criminal law. The study information was obtained by means of interviews. Additional information was also obtained through participating observations – the young people were observed over a number of daily sessions during their stay in the institution. This study is an exploratory study, the central theme being the experiences of the young people themselves in the institutions. In addition, interviews were held with the parents of young people placed in institutions on the grounds of civil law, as well as the supervisors in the institutions. The study aims to clarify the consequences of placement together, as experienced by those involved, and what factors play a role. The young people, parents and supervisors were interviewed and asked to give their views about placement together, from their own perspective. It is striking that the stories and answers support and confirm each other, although the perspective of the three separate groups of respondents is highly diverse.

The young people appear to be well informed of the legal grounds under which they themselves and their group have been placed in the custodial institution. Both categories of young people believe that it is unjustified for young people to be placed in a custodial youth institution on grounds of civil law. This feeling of injustice is linked to the young people's perception that the custodial youth institution is a youth prison which holds young people serving a sentence for criminal offences. At an individual level, the young people serving a criminal sentence believe that it is right for them to be placed within this institution. Only the young people with a PIJ measure (Admittance to a Young Person's Institution) do not agree with the duration of the measure in relation to the crime committed. The young people placed in the institution on the grounds of civil law believe that, in view of their individual situation, it is right that they have been placed in a closed institution, but do not feel it is right for them to be among young people serving a criminal sentence. This is in line with the views of the parents.

In their formal policy the institutions make no distinction according to legal status, as this is perceived as being artificial. In day-to-day practice all young people, whether held under criminal or civil law, are treated exactly the same; all come under the same regime. The young people themselves believe that this vision is extremely unjustified. The supervisors feel that there are insufficient possibilities to make any differentiation according to specific problems and age. The heterogeneous composition of the groups makes it very difficult for the group supervisors to give the young people the attention they need.

It is unclear to what extent such placement together actually gives rise to criminal behaviour among the young people. This can only be studied by means of a longitudinal study in a quasi-experimental setting. This study asked those involved to describe their experiences and views on this particular issue. The danger that young people placed in an institution on the grounds of civil law will adopt criminal behaviour by associating with young people serving a criminal sentence is felt to be a very real one, both by the young people themselves and the supervisors. The findings justify the recommendation to call a halt to this policy – born out of necessity – of placing such young people together in custodial institutions. The actual situation does not fulfil sufficiently the objectives of placement in the institution and holding young people together in this way gives rise to feelings of injustice. In addition, the theoretical justification that was always given for this practice no longer applies, namely that in principle it concerns a single group of young people with the same type of problems.