

## **Disability Watchdog : campaign against waiting list for personal assistance budget in Flanders.**

The campaign '10 jaar PAB. En nu serieus' (10 years of PAB. And now serious), Belgium, October – December 2010

### **Issue addressed:**

The campaign was organized by a Flemish personal assistance budget (PAB) holders organization, BOL-BUDIV, and had a national impact. In 2010 PAB celebrated in Flanders, Belgium its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Thanks to PAB a Flemish disabled person can employ his/her own personal assistant. In Flanders this is possible since the year 2000. The problem is that, even if you have the right on this PAB, after an assessment, you end up on a waiting list for many years. The purpose of the campaign was to disseminate more information about PAB to the public opinion and influence the government to start treating PAB seriously and as an alternative to institutionalization. The campaign addressed the issue of the yearlong PAB-waiting list.

### **Measures taken:**

BOL-BUDIV (<http://www.onafhankelikleven.be/>) represents hundreds of budget holders throughout Flanders, Belgium. Today, there are around 1800 budget holders living in Flanders who have their own assistance budgets and, along with their families, can live a more independent life. Budget holders organizations play an important role in the life of those people. Not only are those organizations born out of the collective struggle of disabled people; they also ensure that the personal assistance budget is established and safeguarded. BOL-BUDIV defends before the government the interests of budget holders. The organization supports all those persons who already have PAB or those who wish one. The support is distributed through information, coaching, training and advice.

Since December 2000 it is possible for disabled people in Flanders to receive a personal assistance budget. For those people PAB is a relief from their daily concerns. PAB is a direct payment scheme to support people with disabilities. In 2010 a minimal PAB amounted to least 8,845 euro per year and a maximal one - up to 41,278 euro per year. This money can only be spent on assistance. How much a budget a person can receive, depends on the severity of the disability. In recent years only the persons with very demanding support needs or rapidly progressing disability were granted PAB. Unfortunately, there are today 5,089 people on the PAB-waiting list. It is not clear when those people will receive PAB or when the waiting list will be completely eliminated. BOL-BUDIV does everything what it can to change that distressing situation.

The campaign '10 years of PAB. And now serious' started with a press conference on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2010. BOL-BUDIV used various forms of advocacy to influence public opinion and policy. A website to promote the campaign was launched - <http://www.10jaarpab.be/> . On the website a rapport titled '10 years. Personal assistance budget in Flanders' and portraits of various budget holders are available (in Dutch).

A YouTube channel was created to distribute the specially made for the campaign movies about personal assistance budget - <http://www.youtube.com/user/OnafhankelijkLeven> . In a humoristic way the movies address the importance of PAB, the PAB-waiting list, too low budgets and the administrative side of PAB. Also the Facebook account was created to spread the news about the

campaign - <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Tien-jaar-PAB-En-nu-serieus/164976023519898?v=wall>  
. To promote the campaign in the media – appearances in national radio programs and TV news were made.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2010 a demonstration against the PAB-waiting list took place at two biggest train stations in Flanders, Belgium. Members of BOL-BUDIV, budget and non-budget holders, their families, friends and volunteers gave out fliers and sand glasses symbolizing the wait and all the people still waiting to be given a chance a different, more autonomous life; talking to commuters who wanted to learn more about PAB, budget holders organizations, independent living movement philosophy as an alternative.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2010 a book presentation took place in the Flemish Parliament, in Brussels. The book is called 'Vrijheid heeft een naam' (Freedom has a name) and was written for BOL-BUDIV in celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PAB. The main theme of this very accessibly-written book is, of course, personal assistance service in Belgium – its history, policy work, present situation and also its future. It contains personal stories and testimonies of children, adults, people with mental and physical disabilities, budget holders, people on PAB-waiting list, personal assistants.

**Result:**

The campaign was another call to the government – a call for a change. It resulted also in social recognition. The public was made more aware and sensitive to the problem. Over 2000 sandglasses and fliers were distributed. More information was disseminated about personal assistance budgets as an alternative, about the yearlong PAB-waiting list and a lack of progress in eliminating it. Most importantly, however, the people behind PAB – disabled persons and their families, friends and supporters – were able to speak out more clearly, share their stories and experiences and start a dialogue with anyone who was interested in knowing more about PAB. The campaign caused a massive media response too (articles in national newspapers, news item on national TV and radio).