

A story by a Berber-speaking intercultural mediator

Yema, 78, has an appointment with her social worker. She has some questions about Zayn, her mentally disabled son who lives with her.



A fortnight ago, Yema tells us, her son fell down in the kitchen in the middle of the night. Just like that, while he was pouring water into a glass. Yema got up and, to her great shock, saw that her son was lying on the floor and was no longer breathing. She panicked and tried to save his life. Only after a few minutes did he regain consciousness. All the while, Yema did not call the emergency services. She was afraid that Zayn would be taken to the hospital to be treated and that she would not be able to get to him in time in case he died. Yema kept her son at home and took care of him as best she could. For three days she was unable to eat or sleep for fear that Zayn would have another attack, she says.

Because of his mental disability, Zayn cannot work. The family doctor and the social worker have submitted a file to the social security service so that he can receive benefits. Yema asks why the reply is taking so long. The social worker explains that when they first submitted the file, an invitation was sent for a medical examination and an interview. Zayn went to the appointment on his own and told the doctor that he only has a problem with his toe, but that everything else is just fine with him. He was sent away and his request was rejected. The GP and Zayn's social worker then submitted a new application, this time explicitly stating that Zayn suffers from a mental disability but does not recognize this himself and should therefore definitely have someone accompany him to a medical check-up.

Yema had not been aware of any of this. She asks to be notified when a new invitation for a check-up arrives. The social worker says that she will receive the invitation herself by post. Yema has her letters read by an acquaintance, and if she gets her hands on them first, she can get by. But if Zayn gets hold of the mail first, he does not always show it to his mother. She will have to be vigilant.

The new application is in progress, but it is still eight months until the next medical check. The social worker also points out that if the application is positive, Zayn will need a lawyer to manage his money for him. After all, he himself is clearly incapable of

doing so, and if his mother does it for him, conflicts will arise. Yema is advised to visit her own doctor for additional advice on how best to deal with Zayn's condition and to learn what she can do in case of an emergency.

What struck me in this case was Yema's great fear of losing her son. As a mediator I give her the necessary emotional support. I make it clear to her that she certainly does not have to be afraid to seek help in an emergency.



This story is an excerpt from ***Meer dan een stem*** (more than a voice), a collection of stories by Foyer's intercultural mediators. Available at Foyer in Dutch, with illustrations by Anggita Soeryanto.