

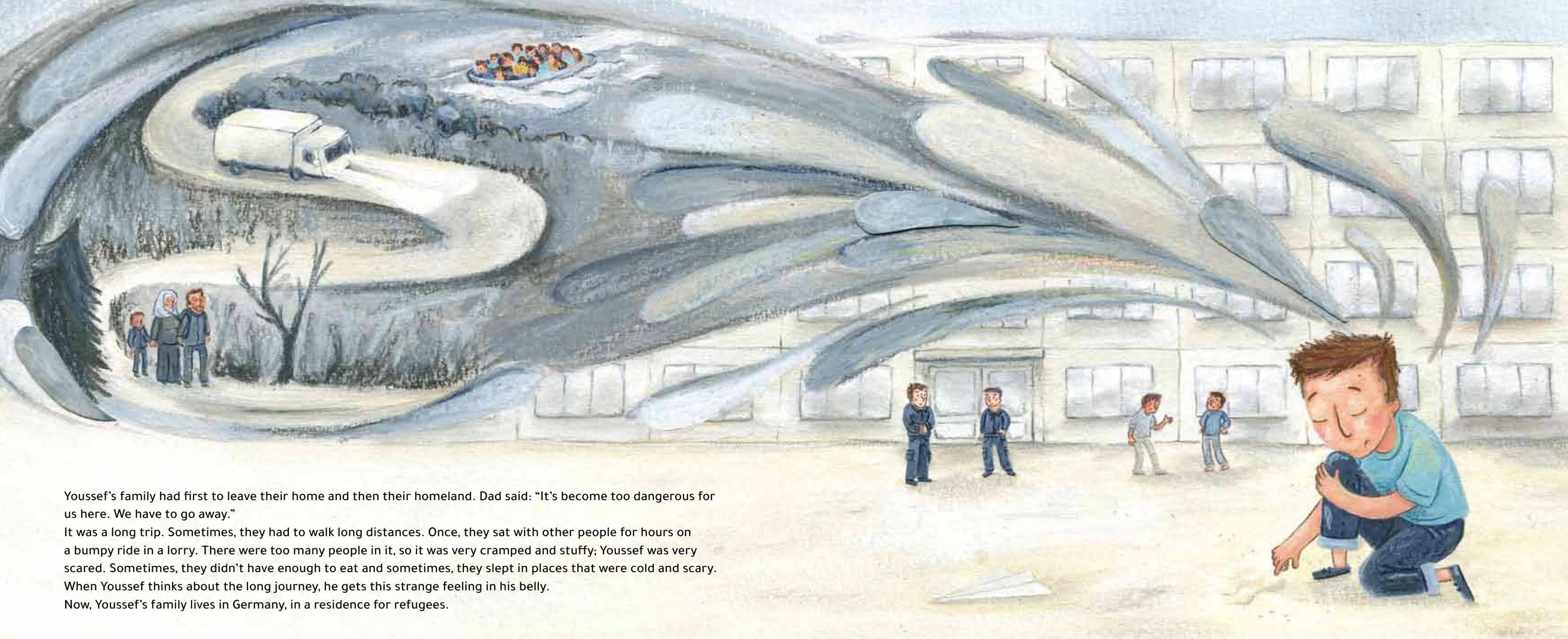
# Nice to have you here!

A book to help refugee children and parents to get to know the German Child and Youth Welfare Services

ENGLISH

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Youssef's family had first to leave their home and then their homeland. Dad said: "It's become too dangerous for us here. We have to go away."


It was a long trip. Sometimes, they had to walk long distances. Once, they sat with other people for hours on a bumpy ride in a lorry. There were too many people in it, so it was very cramped and stuffy; Youssef was very scared. Sometimes, they didn't have enough to eat and sometimes, they slept in places that were cold and scary.

When Youssef thinks about the long journey, he gets this strange feeling in his belly.


Now, Youssef's family lives in Germany, in a residence for refugees.




Youssef, Mum, Dad and the twins Mo and Bo live in a small room. A lot of people live in the residence. They live, sleep and eat in cramped quarters. There are often quarrels. Even the adults fight with one another, sometimes even at night – and then nobody gets any sleep.



Youssef's little brother Mo cries all the time. And when Mo cries, so does Bo. Maybe the twins don't like it here either, Youssef thinks. Sometimes, they cry so loudly and for so long that even Mum cries, too. Then Dad becomes very quiet, and Youssef has that strange feeling in his belly again.



Everything is totally different from back home: the weather, the language and especially the food. There is always the same for everyone in the residence. Youssef doesn't like how the food tastes here. He misses the dishes that Mum used to cook for them.



But for Youssef the worst thing is the boredom. Every now and then, a teacher comes to the residence to practise German with the kids. But every child has the right to go to school! Youssef knows it and he misses school. He wants to learn and to play football with other kids in the school playground. But in Germany you have to wait for everything. The adults are constantly waiting for letters and appointments. Youssef is waiting for school. But nobody can tell him how long this boring wait is going to last.

Aïssatou also lives in the residence with her mother and her little sister Binta. Sometimes Youssef goes to see her to play marbles.

Youssef knocks on her door today, too. Aïssatou opens the door and says, "Hello, Youssef." But then she says, "I don't have time to play marbles with you today. We're going to the family centre." She smiles, because she's looking forward to it.

"To what?", Youssef asks.

"To the family centre," Aïssatou explains.

"The Kinderclub is meeting there this afternoon. It's a great place to play and do arts and crafts. There's also a garden with a great tree for climbing and a slide. Do you want to come?"

Youssef is all excited. Yes, he definitely wants to come. So Aïssatou and Youssef go to his parents to ask permission. Aïssatou's mother and Binta go with them.





The twins are crying loudly again. Mum and Dad can't even hear what Youssef has to say to them. Finally, when he can explain that he'd like to go with Aïssatou to the family centre, Dad shakes his head.

"No, Youssef, better not."

Youssef was already afraid that Dad wouldn't like the idea. Dad has become extremely cautious since they've been in Germany. Probably because everything is new and strange for him too, Youssef thinks.

"A lot of other kids are also there and Frau Schmidt," Aïssatou says. "She is very friendly and plays with us. Please, can't Youssef come with us? We'll look after him."

"No, better not," Dad replies.

"There's also a café for parents and a playgroup for toddlers. The twins would certainly like it," Aïssatou's mother explains. "Why don't you come too?"

"No, better not," Dad says again.

Mum thinks it over. "That sounds really great; we can at least have a look."

"Hmm, I don't know," Dad grumbles.

"I think we should all go there together," Mum says encouragingly.



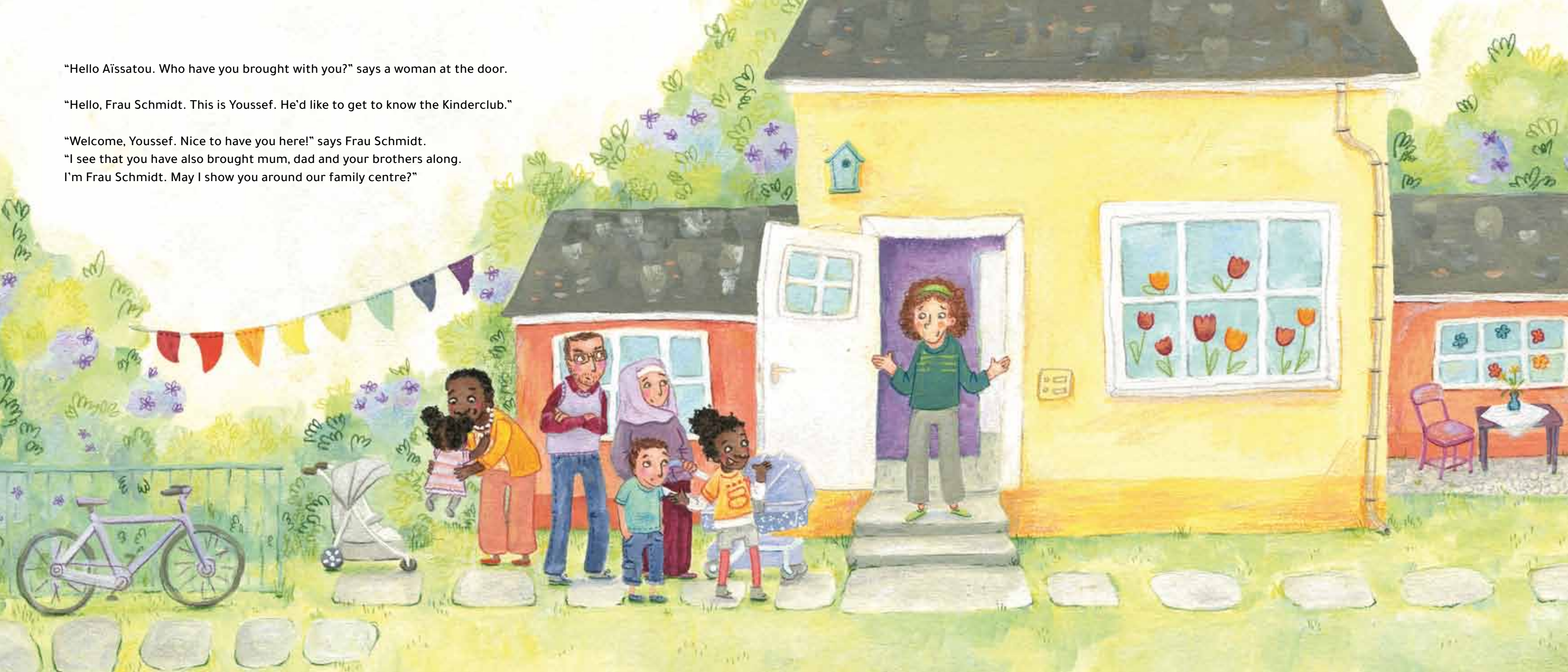
And so they all set off together for the family centre.

“Hello Aïssatou. Who have you brought with you?” says a woman at the door.

“Hello, Frau Schmidt. This is Youssef. He’d like to get to know the Kinderclub.”

“Welcome, Youssef. Nice to have you here!” says Frau Schmidt.

“I see that you have also brought mum, dad and your brothers along.  
I’m Frau Schmidt. May I show you around our family centre?”





“The family centre is a place for children and parents,” Frau Schmidt explains. “Like me, the people who work here, know a lot about education, psychology and social work. That’s our job. We play and do sport with the children and teenagers. We listen to them and give advice when someone has problems. Sometimes, we help with them homework or cook and bake together. We are part of the Child and Youth Welfare Services in Germany.”

“So this is a place for families who need help?” Dad asks.

“No, it’s a place for **all** children and parents. Also of course for families who are looking for help,” Frau Schmidt explains.

“But most people come for our fantastic activities for children and teenagers. The activities are free of charge.”

“So this is a place for poor people?” Dad wants to know.

“No, it’s a place for everyone,” Frau Schmidt says. “In Germany, there are facilities like this in most towns and cities. The Child and Youth Welfare Services are there to help make sure that children and teenagers are doing fine and can grow up healthy. All families – rich or poor – can use their services. Some of these services are available here at the family centre ...”





“The Kinderclub is meeting in the garden today,” Frau Schmidt explains.

“There wasn’t any Kinderclub back home,” Youssef says. “I always played with my cousins. My aunts and my grandparents were there, too.”

“In Germany, there are a lot of children whose cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents live far away. There are places like our Kinderclub, so that they don’t have to play by themselves. Children up to the age of six go to kindergarten, and there is after-school care for school-aged children. You just have to register,” Frau Schmidt explains.

“This is our parenting and family counselling office. When mums or dads have problems, they can get advice here,” Frau Schmidt says.

“I always used to talk with my mother-in-law about raising children,” Youssef’s mum tells her.

“Here, you’ll find experienced people who listen to parents and try to find a solution together with them if there are problems,” Frau Schmidt says. “Anyone can make an appointment. The discussions are, of course, confidential and free of charge and, if you want, also anonymous.”



"This here is the infant playgroup," Frau Schmidt says. "This is where parents, babies and toddlers get together. My colleague is responsible for the group. She gives mums and dads tips on how to play with their babies, promote their development and care for them."



"Here in the café, mums and dads can have a coffee or tea and get to know other parents. Sometimes, information events on family-related and parenting topics are held here. And, besides that, Frau Öztürk's cake is very tasty."

"Hello!" Frau Öztürk says. "You can also come to see me when you need something from our clothing store. We have both kids' clothes and toys in it."



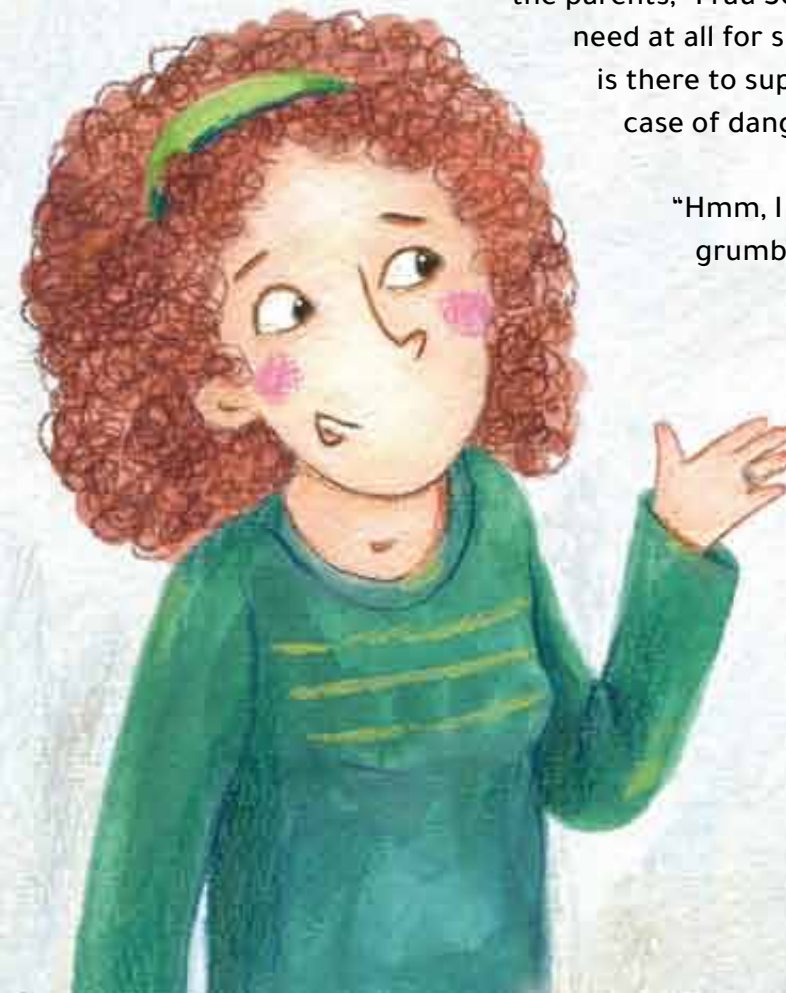
"The Jugendamt?" screams Dad, horrified. "I've heard a lot of stories about this Jugendamt already! They interfere with how we raise our children and take kids away from their family," Dad complains.

"No, nobody is allowed simply to take a child from its family," Frau Schmidt explains in a friendly manner. "Children have the right to be with their parents and parents, have the right to raise their children and provide for them. This is in the Basic Law, Germany's most important law. But sometimes children are in grave danger. Sometimes parents aren't able to protect their child themselves, and sometimes even the Jugendamt can't help. It's only then that such a measure is considered. The decision is never taken lightly. A court has to review any such decision and confirm it. But most of the time when a child is in danger, the Jugendamt itself is already able to help the parents," Frau Schmidt explains. "Then there is no need at all for such a decision. The Jugendamt is there to support families – even in case of danger."

"Hmm, I don't know," Dad grumbles doubtfully.



"This is something we offer for teens. Here, they get help with the questions and topics that are important to them. Such as dealing with feelings like rage, anger or fear or with questions about growing up. This is called "social group work". The Jugendamt hopes it will help young people in difficult situations," Frau Schmidt explains.

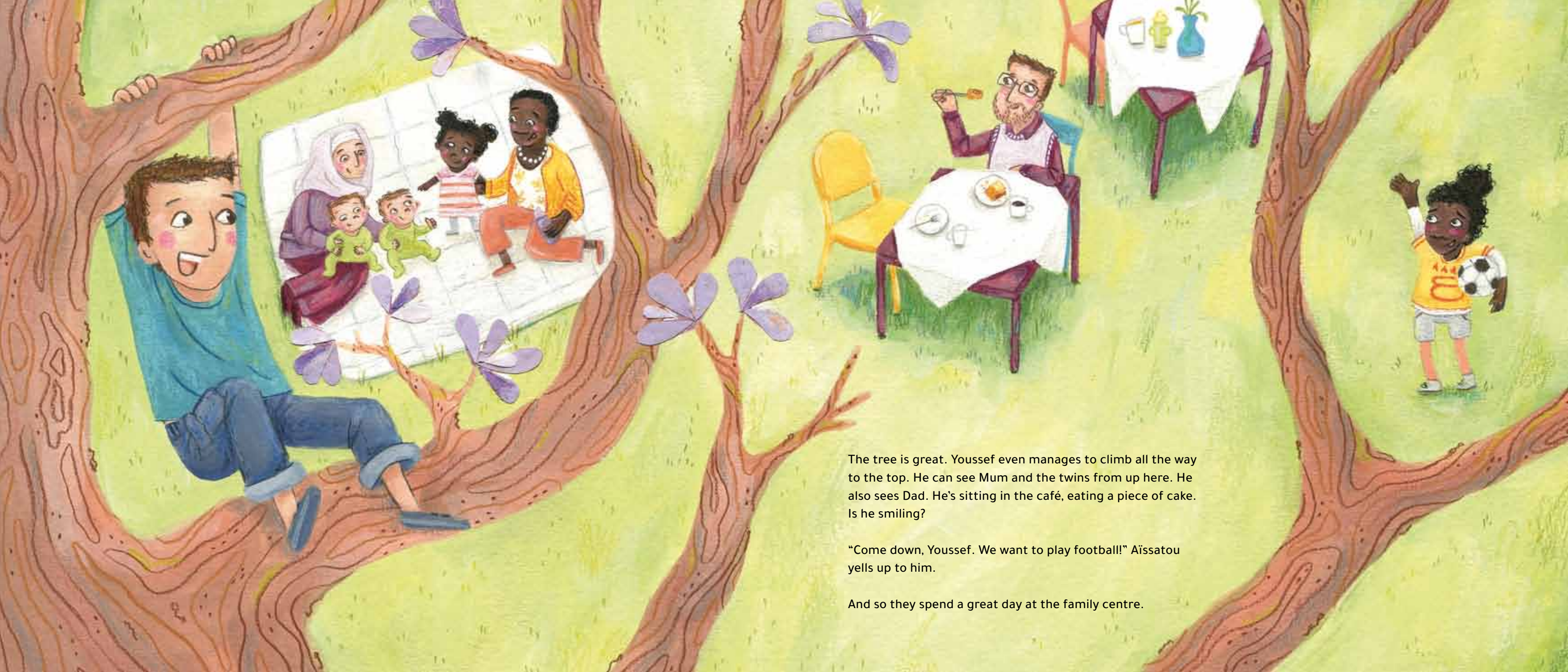


"Can we finally go and play?" Aïssatou asks impatiently. "I want to show Youssef the tree we can climb!"

Dad still looks doubtful. Everyone is looking at him expectantly. "Hmm," he grumbles. "All right. But be careful when you're climbing," he mutters.

"Hooray!" Youssef is delighted. Aïssatou takes him by the hand and they run out into the garden.





The tree is great. Youssef even manages to climb all the way to the top. He can see Mum and the twins from up here. He also sees Dad. He's sitting in the café, eating a piece of cake. Is he smiling?

"Come down, Youssef. We want to play football!" Aïssatou yells up to him.

And so they spend a great day at the family centre.



Even since that terrific day, Youssef, Mum, Dad and the twins have been coming to the family centre often.

The parenting and family counselling office has given Mum and Dad tips on how to help the twins to calm down. And it works! Mo and Bo don't cry so much any more and mum doesn't cry at all any more.

Dad is no longer so suspicious and tight-lipped. Once, he even spoke with a social worker from the Jugendamt. The social worker is going to help to find places in daycare for Mo and Bo. He also explained how the family will get help looking for a place to live as soon as they're able to move out of the residence.

But the best thing is that Youssef no longer has to be bored so often. Aïssatou and he made friends in the Kinderclub and now have a lot of fun playing football with them. And Youssef also doesn't get the strange feeling in his belly so often any more.



Dear Parents,

Youssef and his family are new in Germany and are just getting to know the **Child and Youth Welfare Services**. The Child and Youth Welfare Services are part of the German social welfare system. They are available to all families – regardless of their origin or language. Their mission is to help ensure that children and teenagers are doing fine and can grow up healthy. The daycare facility (“Kita”) is the most well-known service and is used by almost all children in Germany. But as Youssef and his family find out, there are also many more facilities. The aim of this book is to provide you with information about them and to encourage you to discover what the Child and Youth Welfare Services can offer you.

We hope you’ll have a lot of fun reading this book and reading it out loud to your children!



#### **Child and Youth Welfare Services: services and key terms**

##### **Jugendamt**

Every city and every rural district has a **Jugendamt**. The Jugendamt offices have many different functions: they make sure that your town is child and family friendly. This means, for example, that there are enough playgrounds and that the government makes good decisions for families. The Jugendamt offices ensure that Child and Youth Welfare facilities do good work. Social workers also work in the Jugendamt offices. Their mission is to provide support to children, teenagers and parents who are looking for advice or help. When a child is in danger, they work with the parents to improve the situation and protect the child.

**Kindergartens and daycare centres (“Kitas”)** are educational and care facilities that children attend until they start school. Children come together with other children of the same age in the Kita; they are supported by educators and they are able to develop in keeping with their own interests and in a stimulating environment. Attending daycare is important for all children. Children learning German as a second language benefit a lot from starting early. Every child in Germany over the age of one has the right to a place in daycare.

In some towns, there are not enough places for all children: **Kindertagespflege** can be an option in this case. Kindertagespflege involves providing care to up to five children by individual carers. The Jugendamt offices will help you to find a place.

A **Schulhort** or **Kinderhort** is an after-school care programme for school children up to 14 years of age. Children get lunch here and get help with their homework. They take part in extracurricular activities and are given educational support. Schools often offer their own after-school care. The Jugendamt can also help you to find a place in after-school care.

**Family centres (“Familienzentren”)** are facilities in which several Child and Youth Welfare Services are offered. They can help you to get oriented when coming to a new town and neighbourhood.

**Family education centres (“Familienbildungsstätten”)** offer classes on family life, health and leisure. For adults, there are offers on topics such as being in a couple and education. Sometimes there are also other offers such as German or sewing classes. Many classes are aimed at parents and children together: e.g., baby massage, postnatal classes and parent-child classes. For children, there are frequently offers such as early musical education, arts and crafts, and exercise.

You can take part in the **open programmes** of the Child and Youth Welfare Services without registering and free of charge. There are, for example, kids and teen clubs, adventure playgrounds with socio-pedagogical supervision, parents’ get-togethers or playgroups for toddlers, infants and their parents. Many community centres (youth, family or neighbourhood centres) have open programmes.

**Leisure-time and holiday programmes** offer children and teens great opportunities to take part in sports or creative and cultural activities with kids of the same age during the school holidays. Educators are on hand to supervise. The programmes are offered by the facilities of the Child and Youth Welfare Services. The Jugendamt offices can help you to find the right offer for the school holidays. There is also the possibility of financial support, if needed.

**Parenting support** is designed to provide help to families with special challenges, so that children are fine and can grow up healthy despite difficult situations.

The experience of fleeing one’s homeland, coming to a new society and the restrictions involved in the asylum system can also place great stress on families.

Here are some examples of parenting support:

- **Parenting and family counselling** is available to all parents – anonymously upon request. There are parenting and family counselling offices in the Jugendamt offices, in family centres and in neighbourhood centres. In addition to issues of child-raising and family life, parents can also discuss topics related to marriage or being a couple.

- A **Social-Pedagogical Family Support Provider (“SPFH”)** is a trained specialist who visits the family regularly to help parents with specific issues.

- A **parenting support / care support provider** works regularly with a child or teenager and offers help with matters of personal development when there are difficulties in everyday life, at school or at home.

A SPFH or a parenting support provider is hired by the Jugendamt. Parents can contact the Jugendamt if they would like to ask for such support. Sometimes, if the Jugendamt has reason to assume that help is needed, it contacts to the family and decides together with the family whether and what sort support is suitable.

**Other services for promoting the well-being of children and families:**

For **pregnant women, babies, toddlers** up to three years old and their parents, there are also helpful offerings in the area of health: prenatal and postnatal classes for women, parenting classes for young mothers and fathers, and counselling on caring for and promoting the development of babies and toddlers. Midwives, family midwives, social services in hospitals, family education centres and counselling offices in the Jugendamt offices are your contacts for early family support.

**Good to know:** In Germany, there are **early screenings** for children up to the age of 6. These examinations (U1-U9) are carried out by a paediatrician and check not only the child's health, but also the state of his or her mental and motor development. It is important to recognise early on whether a child needs special support. In many of the German states ("Bundesländer"), parents receive notifications. But you can also ask for information from your paediatrician or midwife. U1 through U9 screenings are followed by U10 and U11 screenings and the J1 and J2 youth screenings. The U examinations are documented in a "yellow booklet" ("Gelbes Heft").

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Youssef lives with Mum, Dad and his younger twin brothers Mo and Bo in a residence for refugees. He doesn't like it there. The family shares a small room, you're never alone, there are often quarrels and there is nothing to do for kids. Youssef is bored most of the time. The twins don't like it either; they cry constantly. Mum and Dad don't really know how they can improve the situation. His friend Aïssatou tells Youssef about the Child and Youth Welfare Services. He quickly makes new friends in the Kids Club, and Mum and Dad find out how the Child and Youth Welfare Services can help the family to settle in after arriving in Germany and with other challenges.

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