

The Mystery Box and The Adventure to The Five Lands

A Child Friendly Version of the National Children's Policy 2018-2023

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Kummissarju għat-Tfal
Commissioner for Children



MINISTRY FOR THE FAMILY,
CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY



Message from the Commissioner for Children

Dear Children,

This is a book for you to read carefully but with pleasure and at leisure. It is about the first ever policy that has been written specifically for you. The Policy is a promise the authorities are making so that you will have all the opportunities to enjoy your rights.

My Office was set up to ensure that you get all the help you need to live a happy childhood surrounded by people who love you and care for you. These include your family or guardians, your teachers and many others who provide you with the opportunities to enjoy living as best you can.

You also have your part to play in order to be able to enjoy your rights fully. We want you to understand what this Policy is by presenting it in story form and likening it to a journey all children need to take.

The five lands the three children will be visiting are important as they contain the most important things that can help you learn and find solutions to problems that could make you sad. It is about things that matter to you.

You will be given the tools or skills needed, and a voice to express yourselves and take charge of your lives.

The adults will be there to support and protect you throughout your long journey.

These are powerful tools for you to use. My wish is that all of you would be able to enjoy your childhood to the full.

I encourage you to push hard towards the lands of well-being so that your dreams will come true.

Pauline

The Mystery Box

The Mystery Box

Introduction

Hello, my name is MartinaMartina Vella.
I am about to turn eighteen soon and I live in Marsascala.

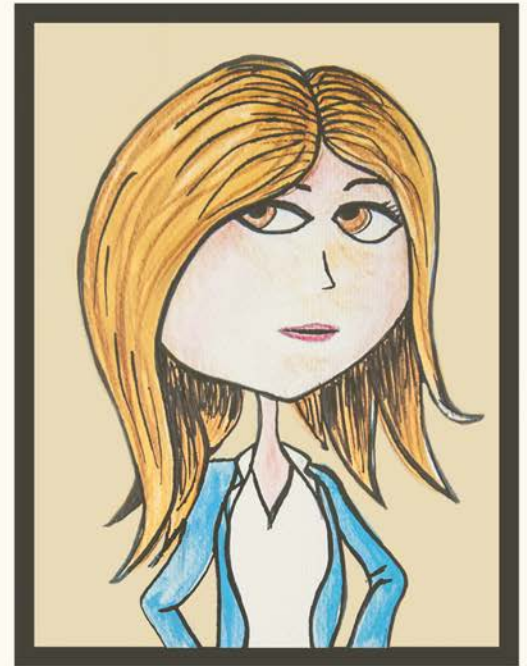
Lately, I found out that the authorities in Malta are preparing a plan about what they will be doing in the next seven years to improve the life of children and young people living on these islands. I read this plan through and decided to re-write it in my own words so that children and young people like me will be able to understand how our lives can be made better.

For me this plan is like a mystery box containing all those things that we need in order to move forward in the adventure that is our life.

In Part One, we will try to open this box.

In Part Two, we will have a good look at what this box contains.

In the final part, we will use what we find in the box in the adventure of life.



Opening the Mystery Box

Before we start, let me tell you a little bit more about myself.

When I grow up, I want to be an archeologist. This means that my job would be to dig up things from the ground that would have been used by people many, many, years ago.

I have always loved the idea of this type of work. When I was a little girl and we used to go swimming, I used to spend hours digging in the sand trying to unearth whatever was buried beneath.

A short while ago, I was digging away in a field belonging to a farmer friend of my Dad's. I could tell there was something hard buried in the ground. I dug and dug and lo and behold, I found a box! My mystery box! On the lid, there was writing in an old and unknown language. I looked it up online and I found out that written on that mystery box were the words:

For Children'



There was more writing on the sides of the box.
Looking these up too, I found out that the writing consisted of four questions.
These four questions had to be answered by a child in order for the box to be opened.

Let us see what this mystery box contains.

The first question is:

What would you like to find inside the box?

Toys, balls, beautiful clothes, tablets, smart phones.

No, hold on a minute! Let's think a little. If you want to help somebody who is starving, what is best, a fish or a rod to do his own fishing?

The fish is quickly eaten but what about tomorrow and the next day? What will that person eat then?

A fishing rod will enable the person to fish, catch fish today, tomorrow and all the days to follow.

So, what is best?

The rod, of course.

In the same way, this box does not contain the goodies you mentioned. Instead, it contains tools. These are not the kind of tools a builder or a carpenter would use, but tools which we can use to do many, many things. In other words, these tools can open a world of.....

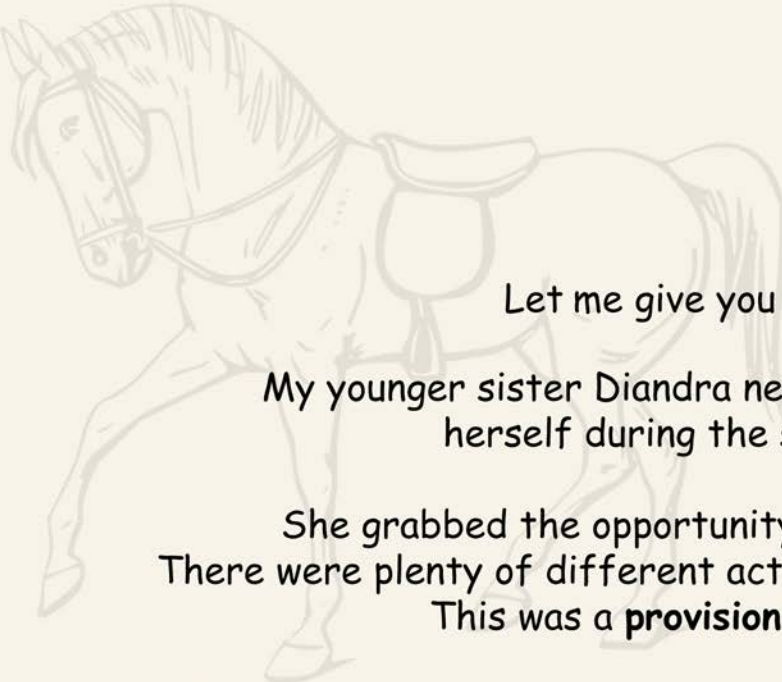
OPPORTUNITIES

I know what you are thinking.
There is an extra P in that word.
You are right, opportunities is spelt with two Ps not three.
The letter P carries significant meaning.

PARTICIPATION

PROTECTION

PROVISION



Let me give you an example.

My younger sister Diandra never knows what to do with herself during the summer months.

She grabbed the opportunity to go to summer school. There were plenty of different activities and she enjoyed them all. This was a **provision** worth taking up.

Once they took them horse riding. The trainers explained to the children what they need to do when riding a horse. There was always somebody who knew the horse so that the children felt comfortable while riding.

Diandra and her friends felt safe and **protected** while enjoying themselves. In this way, Diandra learnt to ride and also began to love this beautiful animal.

Finally, when the horse was returned to his stable, Diandra and her friends met up with her teachers in order to discuss their first ride on a horse ever. They told their teachers how they would like to improve their personal experience the second time round. Diandra said that she would have preferred it if her saddle was smaller as she was afraid that she would fall off as she kept slipping the large saddle.

And thank goodness she spoke up!

The school bought smaller saddles so that younger children would be more comfortable during their ride. In this way, Diandra **participated** in the way the riding school conducted their lessons in the future.. Therefore, in order to have a better life, we need more opportunities to learn and to enjoy ourselves without hurting others, and for grown ups to listen to what we have to say about how we think and what we feel.

What happened? What was that noise?
Look! One side of the box has opened.

Let's try to open another side of the box.
The question this time says:

How will the objects in the box make our life better?

They will help us to play, dance, go out, chat with friends!!

True, but not only. Give it a little thought.
What more do we need in order to be happy?

**A good home environment where everybody cares about everybody else.
Healthy relationships with other children, young people like us and with grown ups.
Nourishing food and a clean and healthy outdoor environment.
An education that broadens our outlook on life and that will
lead to a good job when we grow up.**

Look! The lid of the box has risen from another side.
It will soon be wide open.

The question is this:

Who is going to ensure that you have a good home environment and a clean and healthy outdoor environment?

Grown ups, of course!
Ok. But who are the grown ups?

The Government and State

Let me give you an example.

My family and I live in an apartment in Marsaskala. Next to us there is a beautiful garden full of trees and flowers. One day, somebody wanted to tear down this garden and build yet more apartments.

The people, however, objected strongly.

The community got together to protect their environment.



The Community

This means all those people who live close to us as well as our family.
People such as....

Our neighbours,

Shopowners in our area,

The Mayor and the Parish Priest

and many others.

One day, my brother Paul got into some trouble. He got lost in the streets of Marsascala! He could not, for the life him, find his way home. Every time he thought he had made it home, he realised that it was not our street he was on. He was really upset and he burst out crying.

Ganni, the grocer, happened to see him. He knew Paul because my mum is one of his regulars. He promptly closed up shop and walked my brother home. When my mum, out of her mind with worry, opened the door, Paul was as cool as a cucumber, munching away on the sweets that Gianni had given him.

This story shows how helpful the community around us can be.

The Family

This means not only our parents or those who take care of us, our brothers and sisters,but also our grandparents, our aunts and uncles, our cousins, as well as those not related by blood but still very close to us, like friends and teachers.

One time, my mother was very ill and my dad could not take care of us on his own so we went to live with another family. I was fostered for a while and Aunty Rita and Uncle Mario took such great care of me.

I still call them Aunty and Uncle, even today. My mum is now much better, and my foster carers are now great friends of ours. We see them often and they are part of our family.

See how extended and precious a family can be!

But who else is going to use these mysterious objects?

This may seem like a tough question, because really and truly, who else could it be?
We have mentioned practically everybody.

In reality, the answer cannot be easier.....

Ourselves!

How? What has this to do with us?
Is it not the job of adults to take care of us?

That is true, but if we do not do all we can in order to use every opportunity that presents itself, it will all boil down to nothing.

My friend did not want to have anything to do with school.
Ever since she was very young, she dreamt of opening a coffee shop.
She took a course at ITS and learnt how to run a business.
Now her parents are helping her out to realise her dream.

My friends, please keep in mind that we need to help ourselves in order for others to be able to help us.

SkriiiiiK! There it is, the box is opening further.

Let us try to answer this question:

Why were you given this box?

It was given to us because....We have a right to live well.

Let me give you an example.

My younger brother Paul can be a handful when he wants to. He is always up to something - he climbs all over the furniture at home, grabs a cooking pot and drums away on it, or he decides to scribble on the walls. He drives mum and dad crazy when he does these things. Very often they punish him to make him stop, "No icecream for you Paul" or "No more cartoons for you today, Paul".

But, however naughty he is, they can never say, "No food for you today, Paul". This is because, like any other child, Paul has a right to good nourishing food because, without food, he could get sick.

Therefore, to live well is not something that happens because we are lucky or because we have been good, but because this is how it should always be.

The lid is gone. The box is now open!

Do you want to know what is inside?

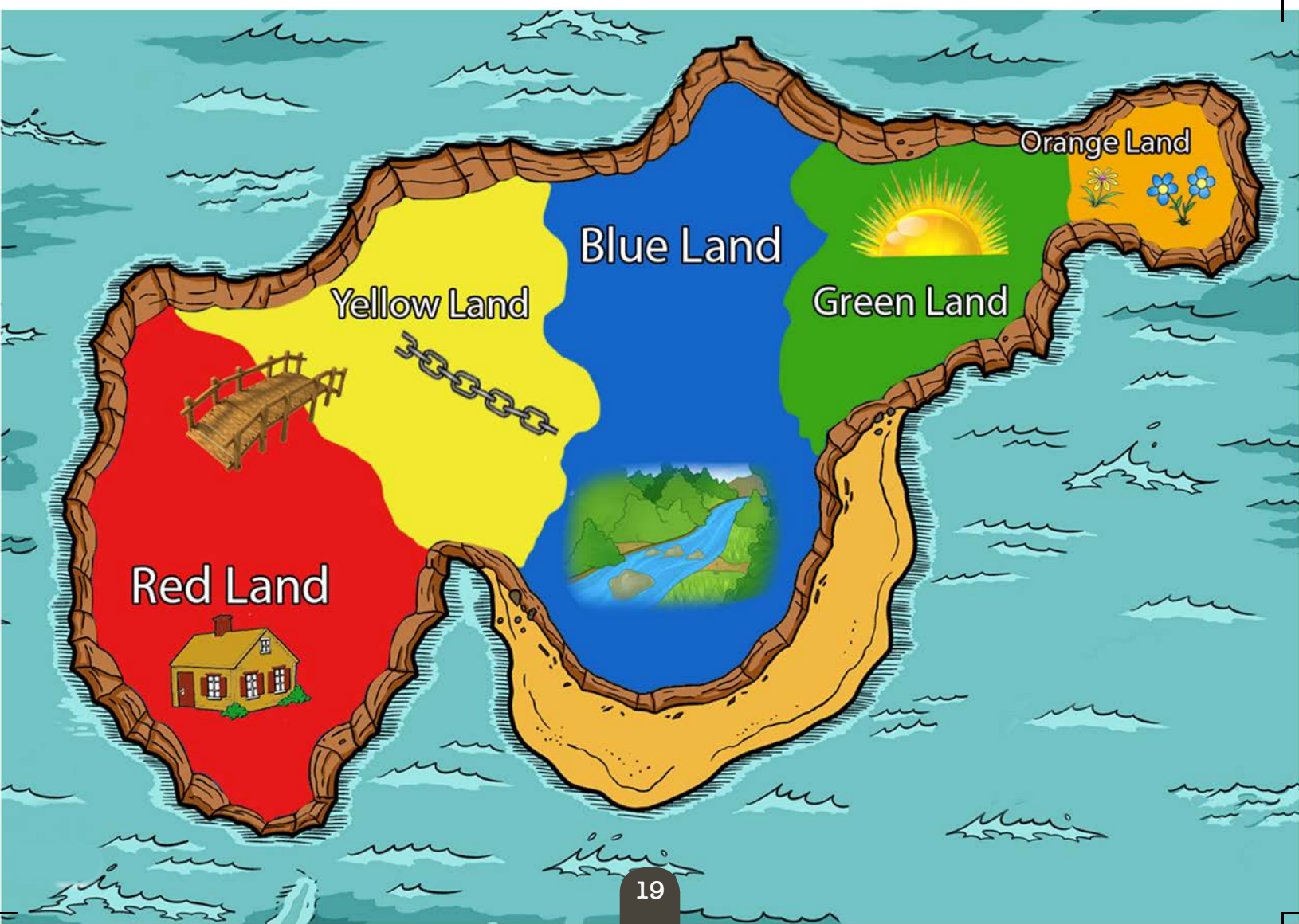
What does our mystery box hold?

The Map

My goodness! Look at the dust, cobwebs and I suspect, spiders, in this box!
I think this box has never been opened before.
All these years buried in the ground and we are the
first children to open this mysterious box!

Isn't it wonderful?
Let's look inside. Put your hand into the box.

Can you feel the soft yet rough texture,
like an ancient Egyptian papyrus?
Whatever can it be? It needs dusting off otherwise we cannot see what it is.
Looks like a map of some sort. Yes, it is a map. But, what sort of map?
Look, there is something written at the top in big letters.
It looks like the same sort of ancient language that we
found on the outside of the box.
Let me check what it means online.



Red Land

Yellow Land

Blue Land

Green Land

Orange Land

The Map of the Adventures of Life

The map is about to show us where we need to go in order to find what we need in life.

Let's have a good look at the map. Can you see what I am seeing?

There are five vast areas of land, just like the five continents on Earth.

Each area is coloured differently:

A red land, a yellow land, a blue land, a green land and an orange land.

But, what is this sign on the red area? It is like a little old house.



What about the one on the yellow area? They look like chain links.

The one on the blue area? Looks like a stream of water.



What about the sign on the green area? Looks like a sunrise.



The orange one? Without a doubt, it is a plant full of beautiful and colourful flowers.

Five lands, five colours, five signs.

This means that we need to go to these five lands in order to find the tools that we need in the adventure that is life.

In the **red land**, the majority of parents live in comfortable houses, homes where children feel cherished and that they are little treasures.

On the **yellow land**, everybody respects each other and is ready to help. There is a strong sense of community. Children are encouraged to express themselves freely. Here, children are very well taken care of, but are allowed to explore life for themselves.

The children of the **blue land** eat nourishing food daily and live in a clean environment. When they do get sick, their parents, nurses and doctors look after them in order to make them better.

On the **green land**, schools prepare and help children to realise their dreams and be happy.

The children who live on the **orange land** enjoy a lot of open spaces where they play and practise different sports. Art, music, drama and dance help the children to develop their artistic talents and excel.

New technologies help the children to further their talents.

What magical lands these are! Shall we explore them a little bit further together?

Let us prepare for our adventure

Hold on, wait a minute!

Can we make this difficult journey to these beautiful lands?

Do you remember the questions on the outside of the box?

There was talk of tools.

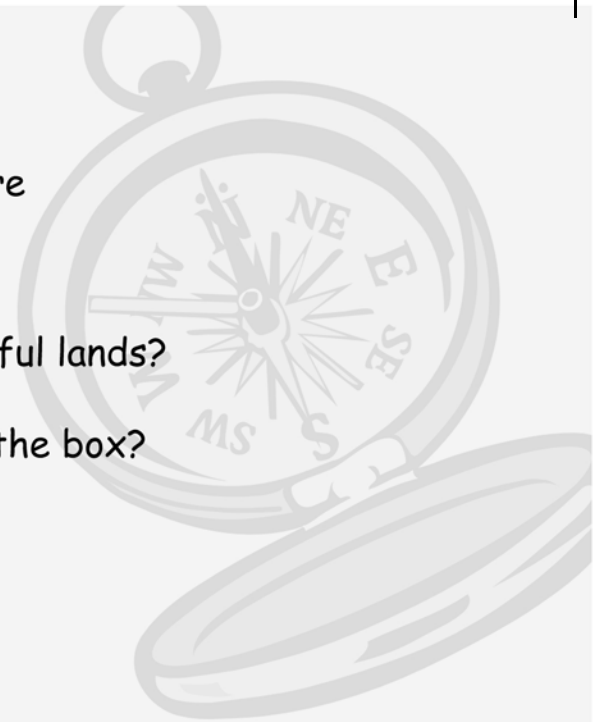
Maybe these tools are inside the mysterious box?

It looks like a watch.

Hang on, it is a compass!

But why a compass? A compass is used in order to know the direction in which we are going, a compass always points north.

The GPS (Global Positioning System) on our mobiles will be helpful too.



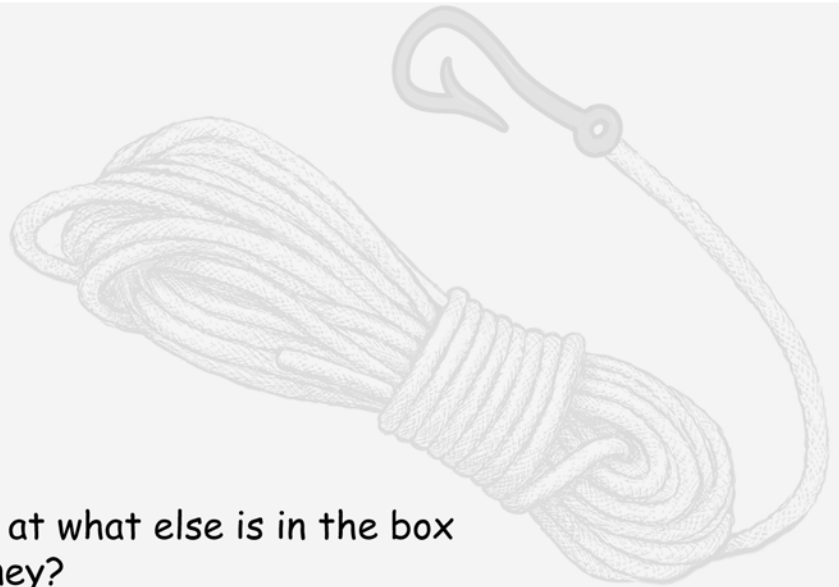
So, let's go!

Wait, don't be in such a hurry!

Is it not better to have a look at what else is in the box that could help us on our journey?

There's a rope.

A thick and strong rope, with a metal hook attached to the end of it. If we use this rope, we can go abseiling over cliffs, cross valleys and rivers.



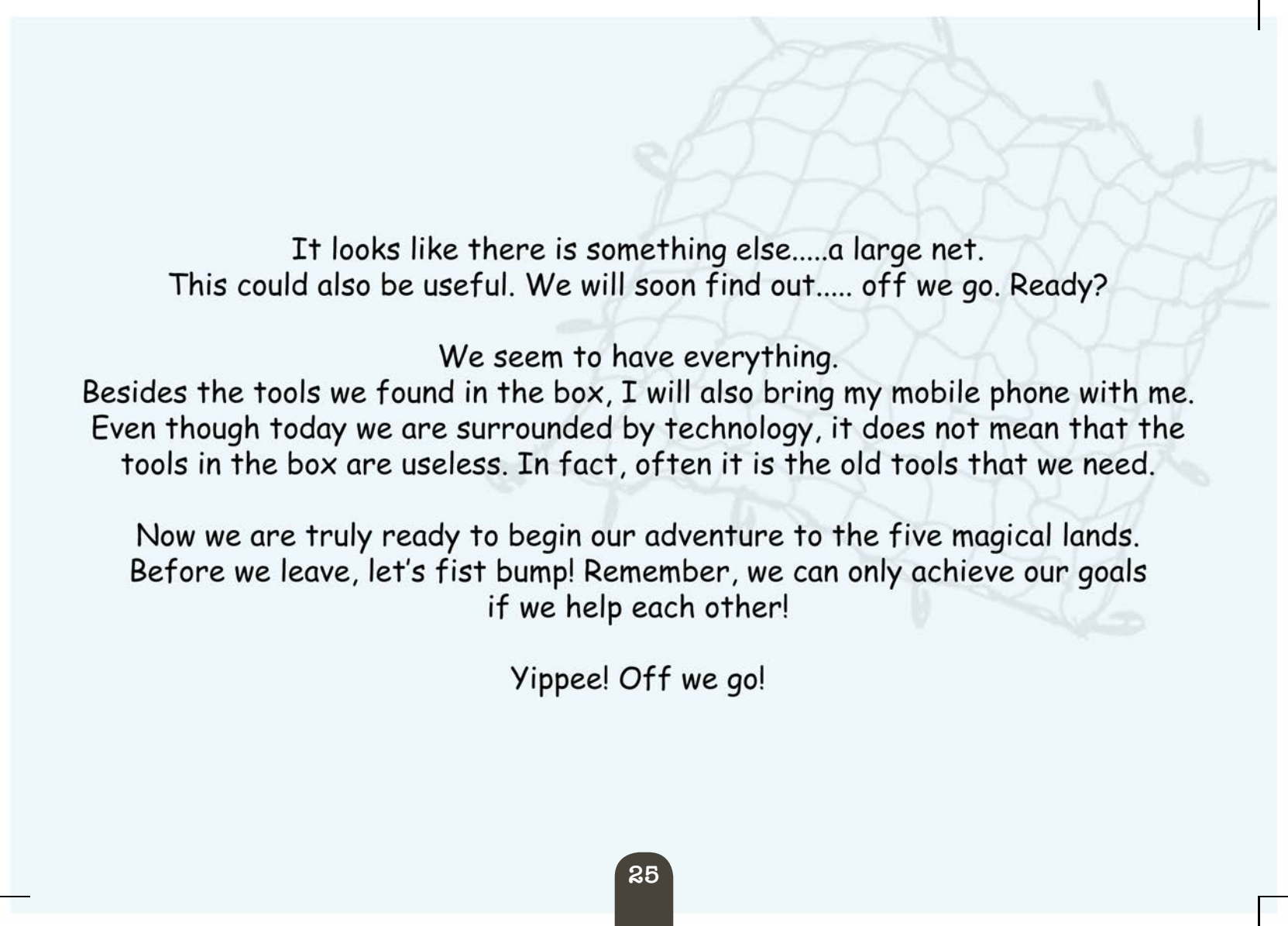
What else is inside the box?

There is a shield, like the one soldiers use in order to protect themselves from their enemy's swords.

At the back of the shield there is a handle.

If we hold this shield in front of us, it will protect us on our journey to these magical lands.





It looks like there is something else.....a large net.
This could also be useful. We will soon find out..... off we go. Ready?

We seem to have everything.
Besides the tools we found in the box, I will also bring my mobile phone with me.
Even though today we are surrounded by technology, it does not mean that the
tools in the box are useless. In fact, often it is the old tools that we need.

Now we are truly ready to begin our adventure to the five magical lands.
Before we leave, let's fist bump! Remember, we can only achieve our goals
if we help each other!

Yippee! Off we go!

The Adventure to the Five Lands

The Adventure to the Five Lands

The adventure is on!

Before we set off, let us meet the three brave youngsters who have taken up this challenge and are ready to set off with us on this life voyage.

George is ten. When he was just seven, George was fostered because his own parents could no longer take care of him. They were drug addicts. Living with foster carers was not easy at first and he rebelled against them often. As a result, George is uneasy wherever he is.

School is tough and he seems unable to learn like the others. Everybody seems to shout at him all the time. He has come to love his foster carers but would love to go home too.



Roberta is a transgender 12 year old girl. Up until two years ago she was referred to as a boy but ever since she was young she felt different to the others.

She was picked on because she would not play with the others. She hardly ever said a word in class because she was scared of being called names.

Roberta became very reserved and her parents were very worried about her. Once she happened to see a trans person speaking on television and decided to speak up. Today everybody refers to Roberta as a girl.



Maria is thirteen.

She does well at school and is very popular. She loves singing and dancing, but often she got the feeling that the others were a bit jealous of her.

This year she decided to set up a Facebook profile, like all the others. After a few weeks, the name calling started, with her so called friends egging each other on. She fancied this good looking boy in class.

The teasing got to her, and the insults and threats were ongoing.

She is scared of reporting the cyberbullying because she thinks it would only make it worse. She is so unhappy.



Off we go to the Red Land.

I am going to let the children walk in front so that they make their own discoveries.

They can use any of the tools in the box.

Each land will present tough challenges and I hope that together, they will be able to overcome them.

I have brought my mobile with me so that, should it be absolutely necessary, I will be able to help them out.



George is running ahead. He has stopped at the edge of the valley looking ahead at the Red Land on the other side. He turned to the others and together they decided to try to throw the rope in order to hook it to the other side. In that way, they would be able to use the rope to cross to the other side. George is keen to try this out but Roberta and Maria are reluctant. They study the map.

Maria realises that further up, it is far easier to cross the valley as the climb is not so steep. The bottom of the valley is however, full of water.

George quickly runs down and swims to the other side with the rope and hook. He calls the others over and waits for them. Maria bravely sets off.

Roberta is not a good swimmer and she is terrified of this crossing. George and Maria swim back for Roberta to persuade her to get into the water. Slowly, with a lot of encouragement from George and Maria, the three of them make it across. They grin at each other. I am going to let these three enjoy what the Red Land offers.

George is happy to meet the foster family he lived with and also gets to meet his biological parents. They too are making this voyage, but their tools are different, as is the help they receive.

They all seem satisfied with what they have achieved so far. The children however, are keen to carry on with their voyage of discovery and want to visit the other lands too.

I meet them on the Red Land all set to carry on with their voyage of discovery. The next land is the Yellow Land. Here everybody is accepted as he or she is. Help and opportunities are available for all.

Roberta is eager to find out what life is like in a land where both children and adults accept her as she is.

George seems calmer after meeting up with both his parents and his foster parents.

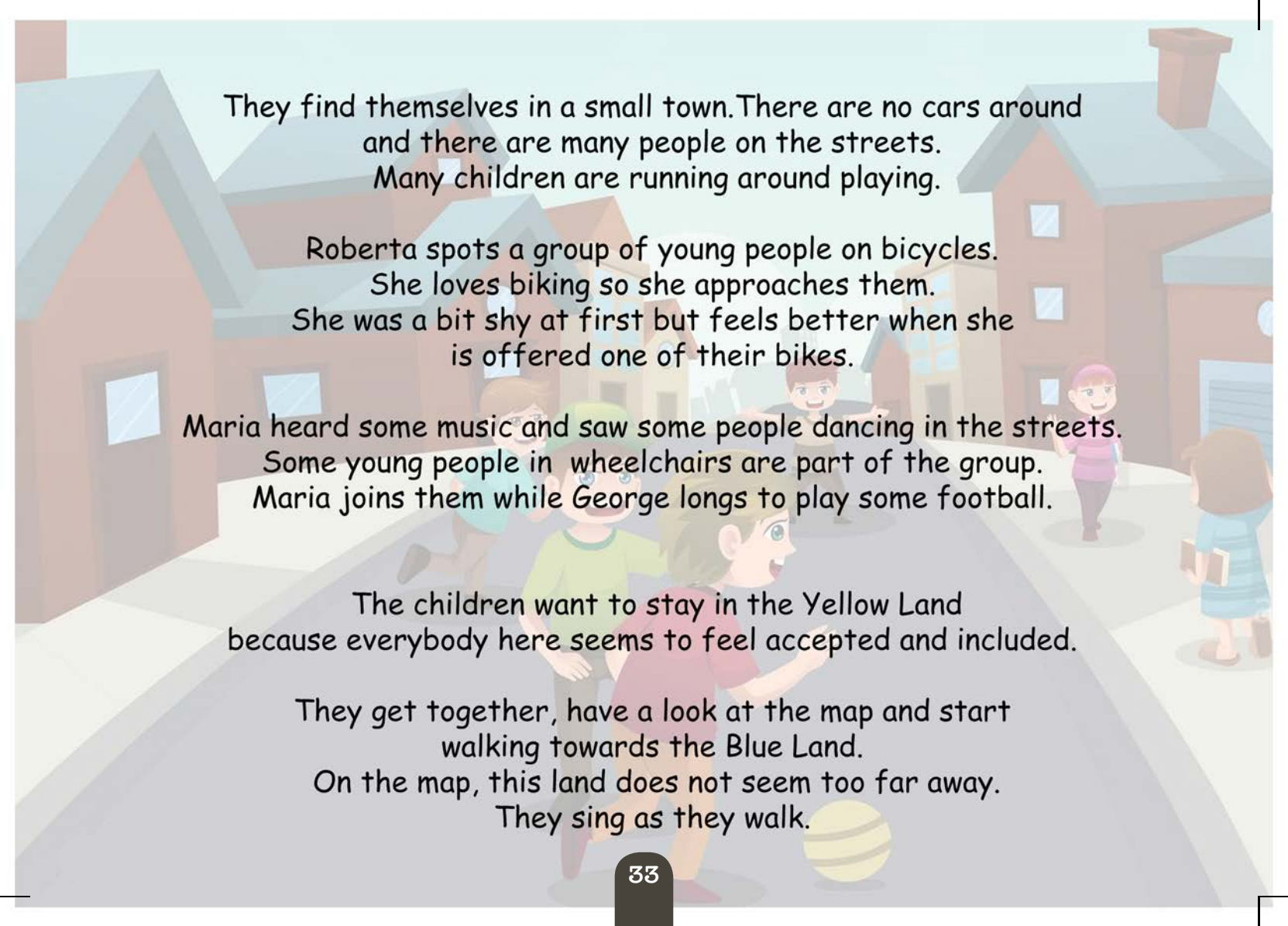
It is not easy for him to accept that they all wish him well. Perhaps the experience in the Yellow Land will help him to accept his parents and his foster carers as they are.

In the Yellow Land,
Maria wished to find support in order for her friends to stop bullying her on Facebook, and that she would not take so much notice of what they say about her.

The Yellow Land is in the East. I let the children walk ahead. Together they try to see where they are. They cannot make heads or tails of it so Roberta brings out the compass and shows them how to use it. They then go on their way. They walk and walk and walk. The road seems never ending and they are about to give up.



I approach them and together we check the GPS on my mobile to see how much further it was to the bridge that connects the two islands. They carry on and make their way safely across the narrow bridge. At one point, Roberta slips and pulls George along with her. He holds on tightly and together they carry on.



They find themselves in a small town. There are no cars around and there are many people on the streets. Many children are running around playing.


Roberta spots a group of young people on bicycles. She loves biking so she approaches them. She was a bit shy at first but feels better when she is offered one of their bikes.

Maria heard some music and saw some people dancing in the streets. Some young people in wheelchairs are part of the group. Maria joins them while George longs to play some football.

The children want to stay in the Yellow Land because everybody here seems to feel accepted and included.

They get together, have a look at the map and start walking towards the Blue Land.

On the map, this land does not seem too far away. They sing as they walk.

An illustration showing two people on a snowy mountain. The person on the left has red hair and is wearing a yellow shirt and blue pants. The person on the right has brown hair and is wearing a green shirt and red pants. They are both holding a large black net above their heads to catch falling stones. Several dark, irregularly shaped stones are shown falling from the sky. The background is a bright, hazy sky with a blue and white color palette.

All of a sudden they find themselves in a spot where every so often, small pebbles roll down on them.

Roberta brings the net out and they hold it above their heads to protect themselves from the falling stones. The three of them begin to run.

George lets go of the net and runs ahead. He never sees the hole in the ground and falls, twisting his ankle painfully. Maria and Roberta rush to help him.

The stones seem to have stopped rolling down on them. Together they pull George up and keep on walking.

They finally get to the Blue Land. The air feels clean here. George is in a lot of pain and they do not know what to do. I run down and together we search online to find the nearest clinic or hospital. In the Blue Land there is a clinic in every village. Healthcare is free for everybody.

We quickly find a clinic and George is seen to by a doctor. His leg is not fractured and they place some ice on it and later bandage him up. George is given a pair of crutches.



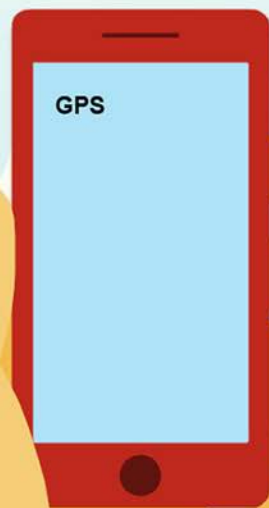
George, despite the pain, calms down and the three set off to find somewhere to eat as they are very hungry.

George would like a *ftira* with tuna, Roberta wants a chicken wrap and Maria prefers a cheese sandwich with lettuce and tomatoes.

After a good meal, they are sleepy, but decide to carry on before it gets dark.

Once more, they use the compass and the GPS to make sure they are going in the right direction. Soon they will get to the Green Land. The first thing they note is a school. Once inside, they immediately feel at home.

The environment is lovely, colourful walls and an enormous playground for the children to play in. Maria goes into a classroom where children are learning algebra. Lessons are very different here. The children are playing a game and are enjoying it tremendously.



Maria does not notice how much time has passed. When she realises, she sets off in search of George. She finds him in a classroom with the teacher sitting next to him, making sure he understands the lesson.

Maria sees Roberta on her way to the toilets. Here they are gender neutral.

A bell rings. School is over for the day and the three of them join the children on their way out.

Many children go home on foot, while others use their bicycles, which they would have parked inside the school.

Maria, Roberta and George decide to carry on, on their way to the Orange Land. Roberta is staring at the map but she seems lost. She cannot work out a way how to get there.

The others give it a try too, but the roads there all seem very dangerous. The children are tired after all this adventure, so I decide to give them a helping hand by giving them my mobile and its GPS. Soon, they are on their way to the Orange Land.

The first place they come to is an enormous open space where children are running freely. Maria notes some older children, sitting quietly absorbed in their tablets and mobiles. Free wifi is available. Maria quickly makes her way to this group and borrows an available tablet.

Ever since they had been on this adventure she had not checked Facebook. Now that she logs on, she finds many messages from her so called 'friends' which are not very friendly.

Maria bursts out crying and remembers the cyberbullying. She is embarrassed in front of George and Roberta, who have no idea how to help her.

I approach them and remind them of the shield in the box. This is a magic shield which gives you courage and protects you.

Maria grabs the shield and decides that she will no longer take any notice of her friends on Facebook.

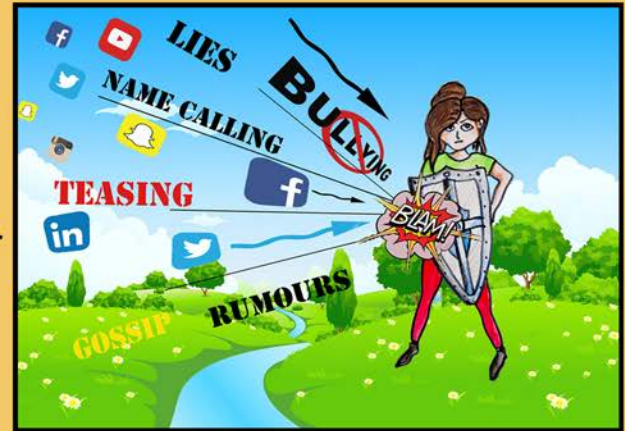
The shield shows her how to block them so that they cannot bother her any more.

At that moment, Maria sees a woman walking towards her.

She asks Maria why she is upset and tells her that, like the shield, she was there to protect children and help them with their online problems. Maria pours her heart out to this woman and gets a great big hug in return.

Maria had done the best thing by blocking these so called friends.

Maria is encouraged to talk to her parents as well as to the Head at her school about this online bullying.



Conclusion

We have reached the end of our adventure. Let's put the five tools that we have used back into the mystery box. In go the map, the compass, the rope, the net and the shield.

We shall put the box back where we found it so that children and young people in the future will be able to find it, as we did. Another generation of children will be able to find their way to the five ideal lands.

Remember, everybody has the RIGHT to live happily, as are Roberta, George and Maria now. This means that with this seven-year plan, adults (the state, the community and the family), will be working in your interest. However, that it is not enough to be given the opportunities, you need to strive to get there.

- Be inquisitive. Learn all about the world around you.
- Listen and learn from those who know more than you and who love you dearly.
- Never give up.
- Take care of yourselves.
- Help each other.

Friends, now it is time to put this booklet back in its place and start working alongside the adults we spoke about before, in order to realise your dreams and to be happy.

Cheers,

Martina xxxxxx



