

Introduction

It all began in 1985 with a few volunteers who discreetly made themselves useful to the many asylum seekers in and around Klein Kasteeltje/Petit Château, the army barracks converted into an asylum centre. This is how the non-profit organisation Bruxelles Accueil - Porte Ouverte came into being. In that association, interpreting and translating was only part of the service.

Twelve years later, on 1 October 1997, now twenty-five years ago, Brussels Onthaal/Bruxelles Accueil (BOBA) started in its current form. A two-unit specifically dedicated to interpretation and translation work with volunteers. In the first year, the unit provided 821 services, but in the past year that figure rose to more than 35,000.

We can call on a regiment of some 1,200 active translators and interpreters to help. Most of them still do so on a voluntary basis. Whereas in the early days those volunteers were often expatriates from the EU civil service, well-intentioned citizens and missionaries, they are now mostly well-integrated migrants, who in the meantime have mastered Dutch or French sufficiently well to assist newcomers in communication. They do so with warmth and helpfulness and with the multilingual phlegm of our capital.

This publication on the 25th anniversary of BOBA is the perfect stage to congratulate and thank our volunteers for their work. Not just for the interpretation work on itself, but also for the great social warmth they thereby generate in a society struggling to cope with newcomers. The many outdoor sleepers around the Klein Kasteeltje/Petit Château and elsewhere in Brussels prove how difficult it is for newcomers to find their way into Belgian society.

This social interpretation and translation work is also extremely efficient thanks to our fantastic BOBA team: with Marianne Scheppers as inspirator and coordinator and the wonderful team she has brought together: Vanessa, Laura, Zahia, Abdirashid, Shpend, Asama, Abdellah, Serge, Carmela, Lusya, Youssef, Yasir, Linde, who fulfil their mission every day with a smile.

I want to thank also to all the social organisations and public services for the trust they keep in our association, and to the authorities who support the functioning of our organisation with their subsidies.

All these actors humbly make BOBA one of the finest associations in Brussels. And when necessary, our Brussels association also helps out throughout Flanders and Wallonia to provide social interpretation and translation services

Bob Pleysier, BOBA Chair