

Mainstreaming: our approach to domestic violence

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Introduction

The aim of this presentation at the conference and this hand-out is to give you an impression and overview of the process of mainstreaming of the shelter organisations in the Netherlands.

To begin with I would like to introduce you the topics:

- introduction of the situation in the Netherlands
- the services of Blijf Groep as an example of the development from a shelter into a center for domestic violence and a domestic violence escalation model
- aspects of mainstreaming
- two examples of a new programme and a new concept
- advantages
- threats and
- challenges for the future and conclusion.

The first topic is an introduction of the situation in The Netherlands with some facts:



The Netherlands is a rather small country in Western Europe with a relatively high number of inhabitants and a high economic standard. It has a population of over 16 million.

The most recent estimates indicate that there are approximately 500,000 incidents of domestic violence in the Netherlands each year. Of these, between 12 and 15% are reported to the police (63.000 incidents in 2006).

The Netherlands has a comprehensive system of facilities for victims of domestic violence, which includes about 3000 'beds' for women and their children. At the moment there are about 15 shelter organisations in the parts of the country that offer a range of different services and about 20 smaller shelters, offering traditional shelter services for women and children. All shelters are member of a national umbrella organisation. The national budget for all these organisations together is almost € 70 million per year.

Since 2002 the Dutch government has carried out an extensive programme (private violence – public issue). The measures in this programme were especially aimed at creating an infrastructure, achieving cooperation, implementing legislation and providing help. This approach will be continued in the period 2008 - 2011 (the next phase) as a follow up. Combatting domestic violence is one of the core tasks of the Dutch police.

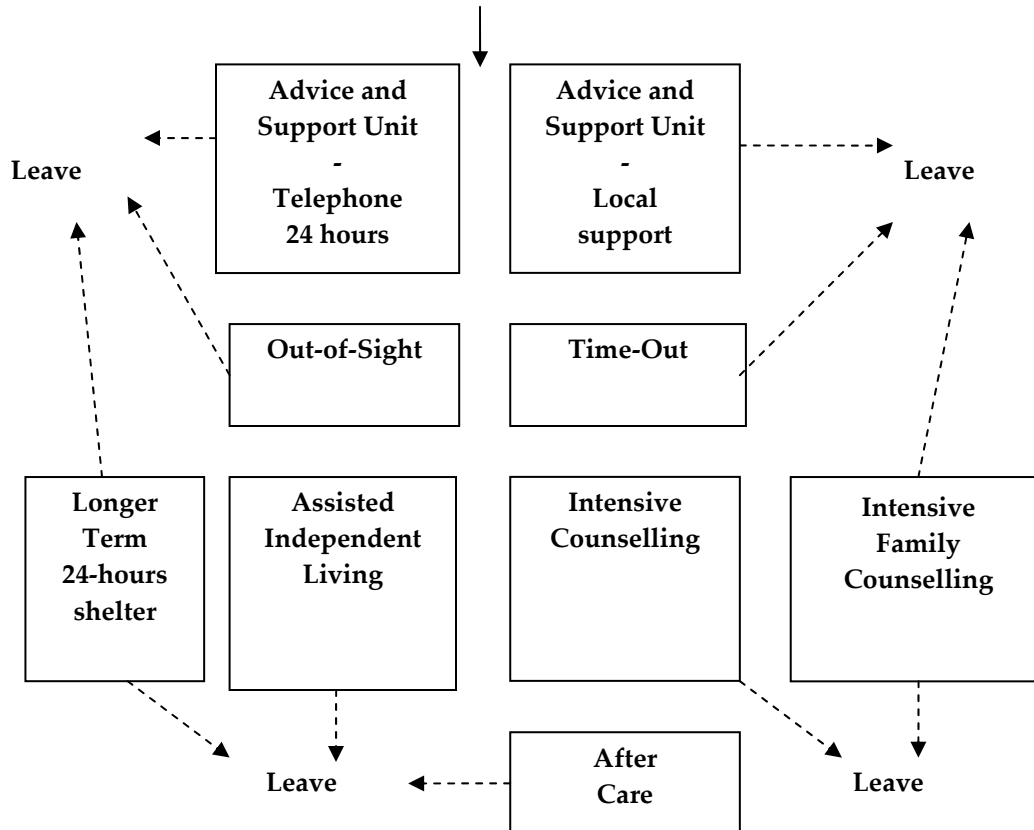
The Dutch government has introduced a genderneutral definition of domestic violence. Of course figures show that about 90% of domestic violence reported to the police is violence against women (and their children).

The name of my organisation is 'Blijf Groep, thuis in huiselijk geweld', which means something like expert in domestic violence. Blijf Groep provides a range of services for victims of domestic violence in the Dutch provinces of North Holland and Flevoland.

Blijf Groep provides services to approximately 2 million of the 16 million people in the Netherlands and is the largest organisation of its kind both in terms of size and work area. Its work area includes the capital of The Netherlands, Amsterdam and the area around it, which houses roughly a million people.

Services

In this figure you can see an overview of our services in 2007:



- The chart starts at the top with the client who approaches the organisation for help.
- The domestic violence advice and support units offers clients advice and immediate assistance by telephone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, though outside office hours in emergencies only.
- Local support teams of the advice and support units offer short-term counselling aimed at stopping the violence; interviews, on average five, may be held at the office or at the client's home; the programme also offers access to the Aware in-home alarm system. In addition a lot of preventive activities are carried out.
- Out-of-Sight is a small-scale secret location providing shelter to victims of extreme violence, operated in collaboration with the police; it is for clients from outside the area.

- The Time-Out programme provides emergency safe shelter for periods of up to six weeks, during which women can choose an appropriate follow-up.
- The Longer Term 24-hour shelter programme provides longer-term shelter in a setting where staff is available 24 hours a day.
- Assisted Independent Living programmes in Amsterdam, Flevoland and the Zaan area provide an intermediate form of sheltered accommodation where women can learn to live independently again.
- The Intensive Counselling programme in the Zaan area and the Intensive Family Therapy programme in Haarlem are intensive follow-up programmes in a group home.
- The After-Care programme provides help to clients living independently after a stay in one of the shelters.
- Finally, the chart shows the possible moments at which clients can end their contact with Blijf Groep.

Since January this year two more small shelters in Alkmaar en IJmond merged with the organisation.

Some new activities are in a experimental phase: an after care programme for children and their parents, shelter services for threatened male victims that need a safe house, a special programme for victims of honour related violence and empowerment activities.

Risk assessment, organising professional help in families after a temporarily restraining order for domestic violence perpetrators or child abuse cases, cooperation within the chain of institutions as the police, are part of our activities.

Blijf Groep has not always been as presented here. It has shown strong growth and expanded significantly, particularly in the past five years.

Our yearly budget is 12 million euro, there are more than 200 employees, 90% women.

These services fit in a model:

Dutch domestic violence escalation model: on a what more abstract level we can identify five distinct phases and interventions for the entire family system :

<i>Phase</i>	Type of help	Goal	Target group	Possible interventions
<i>No violence</i>	Prevention	Peacekeeping	100% of the population	School: spiral of violence, conflicts Community centers: empowerment Educational training: damage to children Media: general awareness
<i>Some violence</i>	Ambulant counselling	Stop violence Peaceful alternatives Conflict resolution	Families in domestic violence situation	Counselling couples Family counselling Mediation Empowerment training Telephone helpline
<i>Escalation</i>	Emergency help	Stop violence Safety Isolation or punishment for perpetrator	Women, children in escalated situation	Medical care Help report Provide shelter Legal action
<i>Shelter</i>	Safety and support	Recovery and future Get back on her feet	Victims of escalated violence	Room, money, facilities Counselling Planning future Educational support
<i>Family back together</i>	Restore relationship	Maintain peaceful relationship	Reunited family	Mediation Therapy Counselling Support for parenthood Support for children
<i>Woman starts new life</i>	Empowerment to live alone	A new life	Women that do not opt for shelter	Job counselling Help find a house Therapy Parenthood support

Aspects of mainstreaming

In this section, the process of mainstreaming is considered from five related perspectives:

- becoming part of the mainstream of recognised welfare services in the Netherlands;
- increasing support in society;
- expanding and diversifying funding sources;
- developing the internal organisation;
- raising the profile of the organisation.

Becoming part of mainstream

When the first "Blijf van m'n Lijf" shelter was set up in the Netherlands, it was important to get the inequalities of power between men and women onto the political agenda and at the same time to supply proof that women's abuse existed. It was also important to give women a real opportunity to change their lives.

During the past ten years new insights have been developed within the women's shelter groups, influenced by our increasing collaboration with the police.

Among these insights are the following:

- Domestic violence is not a personal and private problem, but a public matter and a problem of safety. Domestic violence is often invisible (for outsiders), loyalty and dependency may restrain victims seeking help.
- Help must be directed at stopping the violence and this means focusing on the whole family and the social context.
- Domestic violence often involves a spiral in which the violence keeps on escalating. In addition, domestic violence tends to be intergenerational: the roles of perpetrator and victim are passed on from one generation to the next (the children who witness domestic violence). It is therefore important to limit the damage by tackling the problem as early as possible.
- Interventions must target a broad group encompassing all involved in domestic violence: victims, perpetrators and witnesses.
- An integrated approach is important, involving cooperation between helping agencies, the police and prosecution services, in such a way that all the expertise necessary is mobilised in the client's interest.

We have come to regard violence differently. We no longer view domestic violence purely and only as the result of inequalities of power between men and women. Of course we are still concerned with these inequalities and the abuse of power but other dimensions are also involved:

- a low self esteem
- low socio-economic status or economic dependence;
- substance abuse;
- intergenerational factors such as growing up in a family where there is a lack of attention or where there is abuse and neglect;
- finally, there are also different cultural or subcultural beliefs.

Our vision of safety has become less monocausal and more dynamic too. It is about providing care while remaining aware of the risks. Employees and clients are responsible for their own actions and for their own contribution to the violence. Lack of safety "from within" is at least as important as lack of safety "from without". Women who call on our services are victims of violence who deserve protection. In the past there was little regard for the fact that women, though they may be victims of violence, can also create their own lack of safety: among themselves in respect of other women, but also in respect of children and employees. Our tendency to think of victims and perpetrators in absolute terms has also become more differentiated.

A recently published large-scale national Dutch survey among clients of women's shelter services has confirmed our experience in practice: women who use a shelter with their children are in a very vulnerable position, there is a multiplicity of problems with consequences for their health and their perspective of an independent existence.

Problem areas are: domestic violence or honour related violence, debts, addiction, unemployment and lack of education, psychical and psychiatric problems of women and children, pedagogic problems, legal problems, safety problems, guardianship of the children, problems with language of culture, forced prostitution or teenage pregnancy, relational problems (divorce etc.), housing problem etc.

Example of a new service

The Assisted Return programme is a good example of the new type of service we provide. We started operating the programme several years ago and it has now

become an established part of our services. It is a short term, system-oriented programme offered to victims and perpetrators together, designed to stop the violence.

Many women return home from the shelter very quickly. We did an internal preliminary study. A lot of them returned a few months later with the same problems: the violence did not stop, they returned to a situation of isolation.

The help we provide aims to break through the spiral of violence that has developed in the family. Our approach includes the following elements:

- Once the violence has stopped, the first step must be to make the violence something that can be talked about.
- Arrangements are made concerning the woman's return home and/or continuing the relationship.
- Both partners are given tools to enable them to operate as a couple without outbursts of violence.
- Clients must become aware of alternative ways of dealing with conflict and be able to apply them.
- Clients must gain an understanding of the consequences of violence for their children and be able to support their children in this respect.
- Clients are made aware of and/or have been referred to additional helping agencies.

Our approach is competence-, goal-, and future-oriented, stressing the client's possibilities and the here-and-now situation; clients are encouraged to formulate their own goals and future perspectives, both individually and together, and to work at them.

Our approach is also system-oriented, designed to help both partners and, where necessary, the children as well.

There is respect for diversity: one of the key features of the method is teaching people to cope with differences and to increase tolerance of differences.

Use is made of the balance model: support is designed on the one hand to reduce risk factors and onerous circumstances and on the other hand to enhance opportunities, possibilities, protective factors and skills; we seek to strike a balance between the burden and the ability to bear it and ensure that this balance is clear and acceptable to both partners.

This is a short-term, active and outreaching method, with which a quick start is made, and can be used for clients from various cultures. It is important that domestic violence is discussed as explicitly and specifically as possible. The

counsellor remains impartial throughout, though of course the person who uses violence remains responsible for that. The responsibility of both parents for their children is discussed. A directive, where necessary confronting and authoritative approach is adopted towards male clients/perpetrators. The initial, preliminary results are positive.

In addition to these direct results, there were also side effects: the programme contributed to a change in the way we think and act within our own organisation. Traditionally the women's shelter organisations have considered it a success when a woman has built up a new existence as a single parent. Now success means ending violence in the relationship. There is more room for the perpetrator and for the dynamic process within the family. There has also been a transfer of the knowledge and understanding gained in this project to others.

Support in society

Domestic violence has become a national political priority in the Netherlands. As a result domestic violence is no longer exclusively, or even primarily, a theme monopolised by the women's shelter groups. The role of our organisations has thereby changed. We are now developing into organisations with expertise on domestic violence, who regard this field as our core business and provide professional help and assistance.

Diversification of funding

Our organisations have more than one source of funding: we could develop this diversification because of our changed view on violence and the needs of our clients.

Our expanding work area has also led to an increase in resources.

We actively seek funds for new projects from charities and businesses, and the funds from the various sources are now brought together so that we can offer women an integrated package of help and assistance.

For some years now the various shelter organisations have been working together more and more at the national level. The organizational form that has been adopted is a national committee at the umbrella organisation. On the one hand this is intended as a national lobby, and on the other hand to ensure more unity of action and a higher professional profile.

A volunteer organisation turns professional

The organisations has grown internally as well. Blijf Groep has developed from a missionary through a transitional to a more professional organisation during the last 15 years. The focus was first on enterprise and productivity, then on management and now in addition also on integration. In a scheme:

<i>Organisational phase:</i>	Missionary	Transitional	Professional
<i>Developmental phase:</i>	1990 Focus on enterprise and productivity	2000/2005 Focus on management	2008 In addition to management, focus on integration
<i>Characteristics:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A lot of "soul" - Ideology - A saviour's role - Inward looking - Loyalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confusion - Resistance - Loss of loyalty - More awareness of "outside" - Shift in professional role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loyalty to profession - Coherence - Aware of "drivers" - Core tasks - Rights/ responsibilities
<i>Method:</i>	Everyone has a say, "my idea"	Distinction between deciders and doers	Layered communication structure; interfaces; each layer has more say in what it does
<i>Role of management:</i>	Management is broad top layer immediately above workers (based on consensus) Board is very much "hands on"	Management team Broader responsibilities for director New board	Middle management MT at strategic level Director is member of board Supervisory board model
<i>Vision:</i>	Product oriented "We supply ... you buy"	More oriented to client needs	Future and funder oriented
<i>Control:</i>	Little control Few systems Little management information	More systems Management information still not complete	Reliable management information Accountability (€)

A more public profile

Except for high-security locations, the shelters will be no longer closed, secret bastions. In the past few years we have made more and more of our activities visible. Our communication is more open, we organise working visits and communicate our vision in local media.

The principles underlying the development of a new concept (*Het Oranje Huis*) illustrate the way we are trying to raise our profile and become more visible:

- Though it is to be safe, it is not to be secret: shelter at a secret location is no longer strictly necessary for a large group of women. Moreover, safety is often more apparent than real: a secret address is less secret in practice than it is supposed to be, so that perpetrators can still pose a safety risk.
- The aim is a safe – or safer – return home: at present approximately half the clients in the shelters return to the old situation within two weeks without a great deal having changed. This is mainly because they want to end the violence, but not their relationship. In a recognisable shelter, the client can keep in touch with home while she and her partner receive support looking for ways to keep violence out of their relationship. We will be combining forces: by combining a crisis centre, an advice and support unit, non-residential services and so on, we will be strengthening our capacity to help.
- It is important to break the isolation: being offered shelter at a secret address often leads to social isolation because the women concerned cannot tell anyone where they are and certainly cannot receive visitors. A recognisable, visible shelter for a given area avoids this isolation, for the women but more importantly for their children: the opportunity to invite friends helps their social development. By staying closer to the community, it is easier to take the step back into the community.
- We want to reduce feelings of shame and being a victim: many victims are ashamed of what has happened to them. Having to hide in a secret shelter only strengthens this feeling. Moreover, secrecy often confirms the client's feeling of being a victim. A recognisable and visible building radiates self-confidence, and this can have a positive impact on the women and her children. It is also consistent with the importance that has long been attached to empowerment: making progress by addressing the client's strengths.
- We want to make a statement: domestic violence is a societal problem that cannot be ignored. Victims should not have to hide, lock themselves up, and feel ashamed. A shelter that is visible leaves no room for doubt: domestic violence exists and it requires support from throughout the community to tackle it.

Advantages

Advantages for the victims of domestic violence and their families

- there is a choice: it is not always necessary to go to a secret shelter far from home and friends when you want to stop violence; an increasing number of women seeks help in the drop inn centers easy to access, in every city and every region available; the focus for our work is moved from: giving shelter to assisting in stopping domestic violence;
- the services are more professional, there are more and more system orientated programmes; on a personal level we can work with the dynamics in a relation; the complexity and different forms of violence becoming more clear; until now these services are free of charge, there are chances to develop integrated programmes and consistency in police actions and counselling programs;
- shelters in the Netherlands had their primary focus on protection of women; gradually the focus on the needs of children who witnessed violence is increasing;
- the public attention encourages people to seek help in a more early stage

Advantages for the organisations

- the financial basis of our organisations is getting stronger, although we still have to fight for a part of our money every year; this means a lot more stability and continuity than before;
- the professional development of our activities is growing: since this year the 12 biggest shelter organisations have joined strengths in a cooperation for a period of five years with one of the Dutch universities, constructing a focal point domestic violence: research will increase on a national scale (what are the needs of children, effective programmes in crisis situations, the effects of personal alarm systems etc.); also as a result of the already mentioned national survey, the raise of awareness in Dutch society and in politics and our lobby activities, the umbrella organisation receives for the next five years a large amount of money aimed at national improvement of the shelter services in The Netherlands;
- we can work together with professionals of other fields (health care, youth care, police) on an equal basis; our expertise and insights become common practise, the recognition of the seriousness of domestic violence and the (long term) effects on the life of many women and children is still growing.

Threats

Threats

- bureaucracy grows with the growth of our organisations and funding: with health funding in the Netherlands every hour of counselling etc. needs to be registered and signed for by the clients, there are a lot of administrative obligations; this costs a lot of money and a lot of our time;
- shelter organisations in the Netherlands were free to be critical as autonomous organisations; as a mainstream organisation we are part of the society as it is; we still think our organisations should criticise politics, municipalities, legislation etc; fighting for women's rights and emancipation, how can we do this in our current/new position?
- professionalisation means quality systems and quality measures, standardisation of products and activities, acting conform protocols etc; this means: less possibilities for improvisation and flexible reactions on clients' needs;
- we are no longer the only possible supplier of services: social work organisations, health care organisations and others are developing services too; competition increases with the popularity and political attention for domestic violence; can we survive, and succeed in providing distinctive services;
- loss of motivation: because of the loss of uniqueness and autonomy.

Challenges and conclusion

Challenges

- one of our challenges for the future is to preserve our vision, our drive and presence as distinctive and recognizable organisations and key role player in tackling domestic violence;
- keeping domestic violence on the political agenda for many years: it is priority for the current government; we know it will be necessary to keep it priority for a far longer period of time....;
- we are acting in a gender neutral environment, where we have to confront ourselves and our environment with the importance of gender aspects, inequality and political relevant criticism;
- leadership in our organisations driven by vision.

Today the shelters in the Netherlands are in the middle of a mainstreaming process, they become social enterprises, both energetic and pragmatic. We still believe in our ideal: to improve the position of women and defending women's rights. Important characteristics are: priority to preventive activities, early intervention, direct accessibility and believe in victim's own strength and empowerment.

Grateful use has been made of:

- Annual reports and papers of VOA/Blijf Groep
- An overview of the organisational development supplied by Sven Goedbloed, management consultant
- Initial paper on the *Oranje Huis*, drafted by Rijnje de Jong, of Perspeks consultancy; publication on the *Oranje Huis* by Pieter van Dijk
- Publication "methodiek Begeleide terugkeer, VOA", by Anne Koning and Essa Reijmers
- "Maat en Baat van de Vrouwenopvang, onderzoek naar vraag en aanbod", Judith Wolf, 2006
- "Privé geweld - publieke zaak" (*Private violence – public affair*), by Dutch Ministry of Justice, Den Haag 2002
- Fact sheets on domestic violence (Ministry of Justice)
- Dutch escalation model (Liesbeth van Bommel, Federatie Opvang, 2008, project Dove)
- A conversation with Riekje Kok, my colleague of Toevluchtsoord, Groningen