

PRACTICE SHEET

PROJECT TITLE

Safety Houses, the Netherlands

LOCATION

- There are Safety Houses in each of the 18 major town and cities of the country
- Each Safety House is the referent institution, according to the regional administrative organisation
- All the Safety Houses are linked through a national service

DURATION

Started in 2002, ongoing

KEY WORDS

Local security - Partners in office-sharing - Prevention of reoffending - Mental health - Criminal justice

BACKGROUND

During the 1990s it became increasingly clear in the Netherlands that recidivism could not be tackled solely by criminal law. Indeed, practice shows that offenders and troublemakers often have social, psychological or health problems. These problems had to be addressed in order to bring about a lasting change in their behaviour. Other partners, such as institutions in the care sector, had to be involved in the effort to prevent recidivism.

Example: an offender with a drug addiction will continue to commit crimes unless his addiction is treated. A prison sentence is not the only answer.

At the same time, there was little communication among the agencies responsible for law enforcement and the provision of health care and the local government. As a result, they often worked at cross purposes and failed to make maximum use of their respective know-how and resources. Punishment under criminal law, for example, frequently disrupted a programme of treatment organised by a care agency.

Example: an offender with a drug addiction has just started a detox programme but has to interrupt it for a few weeks to serve a jail sentence.

Realisation of this problem prompted the government to encourage cooperation among partners in the criminal law domain, care institutions and municipalities.

The first Safety House was established in Tilburg in 2002. Since then, the government encouraged other cities to establish their own Safety Houses, with the ultimate aim of creating a nationwide network. There are now 45 Safety Houses in the Netherlands. The Safety House is not just a partnership between the participating organisations. It is also a physical building where the partners meet to consult one another. Consequently, the relatively wide gap that existed between the partners when the project started has steadily narrowed in the course of their collaboration.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the Security Houses is to increase collaboration between law enforcement authorities, the local authority and health care agencies so that their efforts complement and reinforce each other. In practical terms, this means that a personal approach is taken in dealing with a particular individual using instruments from criminal law, administrative law and care, and that the police and public prosecution service, the municipality and care agencies endeavour to bring about a permanent change in the behaviour of individual offenders on the basis of a joint vision and a common purpose.

PARTNERSHIP

The project was initiated by local authorities, who run the Safety Houses, with the support of the Ministries of Justice and of Health. Each organisation contributes with its expertise, its information and its opportunities. A formal partnership agreement specifies how the partners work together and exchange information, in particular about individuals.

Safety partners (law enforcement chain)

- **Municipality (Public Order and Security Department).** In the Netherlands, mayors have a number of statutory duties relating to public order and safety. As the person responsible for preserving public order, the mayor is the manager of the local police. He is assisted in this task by the Public Order and Security Department.
- **The Public Prosecution Service (PPS)** manages the law enforcement chain and orders police investigations of criminal offences.
- **The Probation Services** supervise former prisoners on the instructions of the courts and write reports about suspects for the courts on the instructions of the PPS - they are funded by the Ministry of Security and Justice.
- **The Prison Service**, which is funded by the Ministry of Security and Justice.

Care partners (the care chain)

- Institutions for mental health care and the treatment of addiction (financed in part by health insurance premiums and in part by the municipality).
- The municipality's social services.
- Youth Care Offices - financed by the province.
- Partners in the care chain that are specifically concerned with domestic violence, financed by the municipality.

ACTIVITIES and STRATEGY

A Safety House is a partnership among all stakeholders in the crime prevention chain. It is not an independent legal entity. The mutual rights and obligations of partners are laid down in a cooperation agreement.

The Safety House has a support staff to facilitate cooperation among partners, consisting of a chain manager, case managers who chair the meetings to discuss specific cases and monitor the implementation of the agreements made during those meetings, an information centre that compiles individual case files for the meetings on the basis of the information provided by the chain partners, and a secretariat.

Organisational structure

The day-to-day management of the Safety House is in the hands of the "*chain manager*", in consultation with the managers of the different entities who are partner in the "chain". The chain manager reports to the mayor and to the directors of the chain partners. The mayor is the director of the Safety House, which is an instrument of the municipal safety policy.

Target groups of the Safety Houses

Not all cases are discussed at the Safety House. In principle, partners only discuss cases of people who have multiple problems (accommodation, job, debts, psychological and social problems, addiction, etc.) and for whom a combination of punishment and care is appropriate.

In addition, partners have selected a number of categories of offenders who are systematically discussed at the Safety House:

- Frequent offenders
- Robbers
- Members of delinquent gangs and criminal groups
- Systematic violent offenders
- Young recidivists
- Perpetrators of domestic violence
- Former prisoners with multiple problems

The Safety House is intended for people with complex problems and/or for categories of offenders who are a priority for the municipality.

Method

The Safety House operates according to the scale-up model, which means that an attempt is first made to find a solution together with individual "front line" stakeholders. The Safety House only takes charge if it becomes clear that in order for the intervention to be effective, the involvement of the law enforcement chain and of the care chain is required. If problems arise when trying to find a solution for a specific case, the Safety House chain manager may discuss them with senior managers of the partner entities.

BUDGET

Safety Houses are financed jointly by the central government and municipalities. The other partners - the police, probation services, the child protection agency and the public prosecution service- provide the manpower and ICT equipment.

RESULTS

The Safety Houses are evaluated each year since 2002.

- During the meetings there is a discussion about individual 'clients' but not with them.
- The Safety House facilitates the cooperation and encourages partners to draw up a joint plan. The partners carry out the plan. The Safety House monitors whether they do so.

Advantages of the Safety House

- By sharing an office, partners learn more about each other and build trust. As a result, they are more willing to collaborate.
- The parties make specific agreements as to who will do what and when on the basis of a joint analysis of the problem, so that punishment and care are not opposed but rather reinforce each other.

Example: the Safety House will advise the judge to grant early release to a person who refuses to accept treatment only on condition that he or she does accept treatment.

- Action can be taken earlier.

Example: on Monday a well-known offender commits an offence. He is reported to the Safety

House on Tuesday. On Thursday the relevant parties meet to decide on how to proceed. The care partners know that the individual concerned is detained at that moment and is therefore unable to keep appointments. A probation service report is requested. The public prosecutor is informed of the on-going programme of care for the offender and takes it into account in the sentence he demands.

- If the Safety House finds recurring problems in the "cooperation chain", the problem is reported to the organisations that can solve it.

Example: In the Netherlands a person has to apply for jobs for four weeks before they can receive national assistance. This is a problem for former prisoners. It has now been arranged that they can apply for jobs while still in prison so that they are entitled to receive a benefit at the time of their release, if they have unsuccessfully applied for a job.

EVALUATION

- 1) Various independent studies have shown that the method adopted by the Safety House has added value and can reduce costs, particularly with recidivists with addictions.
- 2) Many chain partners who work in the Safety Houses see the added value.
- 3) Examples of specific cases can be used to show where the cooperation in the Safety Houses can be improved.

However...

... measuring the results of the Safety Houses is a problem throughout the Netherlands. There are a number of reasons for this:

- A personal service for each individual is difficult to measure.
- How do you precisely measure the performance of the Safety House and the performance of the chain partners?
- Trust and improvements in cooperation are difficult to encapsulate in figures.
- The chain partners arrange a lot informally and not always at the meetings.
- The ICT equipment is not always adapted in order to provide good management information.

Success factors

- Think carefully about what you want to measure before you start.
- Use mainly examples of specific cases to convince your financiers of the added value.
- Accept that a bespoke chain of cooperation is not an exact science.

OUTLOOK

The project goes on. The main developments that are expected are:

- To draft together with the Public Prosecution a model of prosecution and sanction that will be faster and more efficient.
- This method will be used in the Netherlands for the prevention of and fight against radicalisation.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Information on Safety Houses in the Netherlands:

<http://www.veiligheidshuizen.nl>: This video clip (in Dutch) explains the operating mode of the Safety Houses in the Netherlands.

This practice sheet was updated in February 2014