

## **Domestic Violence trainings in times of corona: “with this couple we really needed to start working”.**

### **Gerte, probation officer Reclassering Nederland.**

Now that due to the corona crisis people are much more at home, closer together and with children who cannot go to school, there is an increase of domestic violence cases. Gerte is probation officer in Zwolle and has been giving the BORG training (Beëindiging Relationeel Geweld – Stop Violence in Relations, red.) for already seven years to men involved in domestic violence. Because of corona it is at the moment not possible to meet clients physically, but she tries to find other ways to deliver the training. “I really see that also the online trainings are useful and valuable.”

It was by coincidence that Gerte 20 years ago took up the job. Being a hard worker and allround probation officer she made long days without taking breaks, which led to a severe RSI (Repetitive Strain Injury). She went through a long period of rehabilitation. “Why not have a look if behavioural training would be something for you?”, a colleague had asked. It turned out to be the perfect match.

Gerte started giving trainings in prison. “How to find a house, the important aspects when applying for a job, how to arrange your finances – these kind of things I taught the inmates, all very practical matters.” She still delivers several kinds of trainings, but the BORG is her favourite one. “This training can be given both in a group and one to one. Because of corona I almost only do individual sessions now, but that works very well.”

#### **Remain active despite corona**

When the trainings were put on hold, this was a difficult moment for Gerte. “You are aware of the fact that many people need help, and that a training would really be beneficial for them. One of my colleagues had just received a severe case of domestic violence and asked me “What should I do with this now?” I also work for an organization imposing educational sanctions on minors, and here they made a lot of use of video calling. They gave me several advices and I thought: if they can do it, why shouldn't we? This severe case – with this one my colleague and I would give it a try.”

#### **Consultation with the prosecutor**

The first thing to do was to see if giving a training to this man and his wife would be possible at all. Gerte called the prosecutor in charge and asked for a temporary dismissal with mandatory treatment, training and supervision. The prosecutor agreed and then the work could start. “This was such a severe case, it would simply be impossible to wait until the end of the corona crisis. Luckily the prosecutor thought so as well.”

Gerte and her colleague made an appointment with the client for a video call. “He and his wife weren't allowed to be in touch for 90 days, but it was of great importance to have them together in this session. So in cooperation with the police we managed to get them together and have them sit on the same sofa, after not having seen each other for 30 days. Of course this was strange for everyone, but we managed.”

### **Focus on a time-out**

A training consists of 12 sessions plus an introductory meeting, an in-between evaluation and a final evaluation. Gerte: "For the introductory meeting and the evaluations I prefer to have the partner there as well. I want to know to what extent agreements are being followed – actually this is one of the first things that I bring up during my start of the process. Also with these two people my colleague and I have set up agreements, especially about a time-out: what happens when you get angry? What happens when the other one gets angry? And how do you decide on taking a time-out or not? Then what would you do during such a time-out, what would your wife do? And when the time-out is over, how would you start up the conversation again?"

For many people this is a new way of thinking: not continuing to annoy and irritate the other, but to split up for a while and talk things over at a later moment. Many partners find it difficult to have confidence in the other one coming back after the time-out. That is why there need to be concrete agreements so the situation remains safe, both for them and for their children. We want to have everything written down: the more concrete and clear the arrangements are, the better it is."

Gerte is very happy to be able to work with these people and to help them. "Now that the training has started, we as Probation Service have a much better (over)view on the relation and the prevention of aggression, and we can work towards more and more contact between the two partners. It has been agreed that first the man follows two parts of the training and then an in-between evaluation is done together with his wife, in order to identify the possibilities of widening the contacts between them. During the in-between evaluation the offense is thoroughly analyzed and I try to take away the tension that comes with it. The complex thing here is that the woman suffers from PTSS, but luckily a treatment for that has started now. By going through the time-out with them and have them follow a joint training on body language and how to reduce this tension, the woman is also active in not always going into conflict."

### **Busier than ever**

Gerte is busier than ever. "All my group trainings I now deliver as one-to-one sessions, which takes much more time. Besides that I am often in contact with my clients as they have questions on how things are going now things only take place online. And of course everything has to be done by phone. When normally I would walk over to a colleague with a question, now I have to ring him or her up. It is a bit less efficient than what we are used to."

Also Gerte's work for the Education department has changed. "We talk a lot about delivering online trainings", says Gerte. "For which ones is this possible, for which ones not? And what to do with those? Another thing is that many colleagues have started helping others and therefore need to learn new things. How to train someone to make the step from an advisory role to a supervision role? This is why we are re-writing many trainings."

Does she consider this a heavy period? "We all have to get used to the new situation, both our clients and ourselves. However if you continue to be creative and think in solutions, then everything will come to a good end."