

Working during the corona pandemic: behavioral trainer Jannette, Reclassering Nederland

As behavioral trainer Jannette normally spends a lot of time in training rooms of probation offices and prisons, where she trains groups of people. However now that physical contact is advised against, she works from home in front of her laptop every day, with a flipchart standing behind her and her clients seeing her via Whatsapp video. Her dog is lying at her feet. "It is definitely quite a change".

Jannette has been working for the Dutch Probation Service for nearly 25 years, of which the last 8 years in the combined role of advisor and behavioral trainer. The major part of her temporary trainings are group trainings on cognitive skills, where her clients in small groups of 6 to 12 people learn how to deal with aggression, tension and impulsive behavior.

The trainings are very successful – according to Jannette because she works from a positive angle and starting point. "Most of them are people who have never received a compliment", she explains. "They always heard they were no good. As soon however as they notice that they are not being attacked, that they can speak freely, then they are open for the temporary training."

Her trainings start from a very basic principle. "Often my clients do not understand why certain things keep on happening", says Jannette. "They simply don't see how their actions lead to certain consequences, and therefore this is where we start: the ABC model (Aanleiding, Beoordeling, Consequentie – Cause, Judgement, Consequence). Something happens, you have certain thoughts about it, you then act in a certain way and this leads to certain consequences. If you do not like these consequences or if they are illegal, then you will need to try and change your thoughts and actions. This is what we are working on".

From group training to solo-training

When the corona crisis started, one of the first measures taken by the Dutch Probation Service was to suspend all behavioral trainings. Jannette: "As soon as I heard this I thought: 'this is simply not possible!'. At the very moment I was doing a one-to-one (solo) temporary behavioral training with a client and it went so well. I realized that if I would stop this now, everything would have been for nothing. Therefore I talked to my manager and I was given permission to continue the training."

It turned out to be a really good move.

"This man is really lonely", explained Jannette. "He has physical restrictions and in this specific period of corona he hardly sees anyone. When I talk to him my first question always is 'How are you doing? What are your thoughts? Do you see any possibilities to change them?' I teach him to brainstorm (alone) on possibilities and options that he has. And then I ask 'What mini-step are you planning to take within the next 24 hours in order to feel better?'. A week later we discuss it again. In this way I try to give someone tools to handle this confusing and frightening period."

At the moment Jannette is considering changing all her group sessions into solo sessions, where she talks with her clients individually via Whatsapp video. One of the clients she already works with in

this way is a man in prison. “It goes very well, but it is hard work. The training takes one and a half hour but after 45 minutes we really need a break. Normally I advise people to go for a short walk, but of course for this man in prison that is not possible. So we did a few relaxation exercises together, simply sitting on our chairs. ‘How do your feet feel?’ I asked. ‘Concentrate on your breathing’. It went extremely well.”

Crisis supplies to deal with corona situation

But Jannette thinks that she can do more. That is why she recently designed a flyer and sent it to her colleagues. “Our target group is often vulnerable and has a hard time during this crisis. I can help them by asking what they are thinking, by indicating that it is not strange at all that they think this way, and by then providing them with tools to deal with the situation. I have some great video material, I can go through ‘mood-tuners’ with them and I have a list of activities they can do when they feel depressed. The most important is to teach them how they can change their day a little bit.

It is however necessary that they hear about this temporary training and know it exists. That is what I wanted to tell my colleagues and why I made the flyer.”

“I sincerely miss my colleagues”

How is Jannette herself dealing with the corona crisis? “I use an online tool to communicate with my colleagues every day”, she says. “Like a coffee-break moment. At first we were just giggling because everything was new, but now it is a big success – many people join and we really discuss things. I am not that much an ‘office person’, but I feel that I sincerely miss my colleagues. Apparently I really need a big laugh now and then! I had underestimated that need, but the video calls help a lot.”