

Outreach work for threatened eviction

Research and development centre De Karthuizer

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Introduction

Until fifty years ago, the practice of intervention was central to social work. The profession was moralist, even paternalistic by nature. By the 1990s, when more and more people who needed help were failing to seek that help on their own initiative, a movement took hold within the social professions to develop a modern version of the paternalism of earlier years.¹

In the new professional social work profile,² active intervention has regained its centrality and is now known as outreach work. Outreach work is oriented towards people who do not ask for help of their own accord, but who do need it. It is often the people close to those who need help who indicate that there is a problem. In this way, it is not the client's request for help that is the subject of outreach work, but an urgent problem.

The Eropaf method (loosely translatable as "get to it"), developed in Amsterdam in 1997 by social workers from HVO-Querido and the Salvation Army, is an example of outreach work. Calling themselves 'The Flying Dutchman', this group began as 'social firemen', working to help prevent people from being evicted from their homes.³ In 2004, work began to introduce their methods into mainstream social work among the nine social work centres in Amsterdam, and this process has now been completed. Tools and procedures were put in place to enable the social work centres to integrate the new methods into their standard practice. These included Eropaf training sessions, intervention procedures recorded in an 'anti-eviction safety net', a system of expense claims and payments for various Eropaf interventions, and an Eropaf registration and coordination centre.⁴ These made it possible for debt relief workers and other social workers to implement Eropaf effectively, thus preventing a large number of evictions in Amsterdam in

recent years. As a result, pressure on homeless shelters was reduced, social networks less likely to be destroyed, expenses to housing corporations reduced and, in the long term, there was less need for intensive intervention.

The central tenet of Eropaf is that it is better for everyone involved if evictions due to rent arrears can be prevented. However, in spite of the implementation of Eropaf, the number of evictions taking place in Amsterdam has failed to drop sufficiently, and it would appear that the method is not an adequate measure by which to prevent problems arising again from rent arrears.⁵ Consequently, it seemed that the potential of the Eropaf method could be better exploited and that professionals needed to cooperate more effectively both within social work centres and among different centres. For this reason, the Eropaf approach was the subject of innovative development in the City Centre and Oost/Watergraafsmeer districts of Amsterdam between 2006 and 2008. With 'Vroeg-Eropaf' ("get to it early"), social work centres the Blankenberg Foundation and Dynamo collaborated with housing corporations Eigen Haard, Alliantie and Ymere to reduce the number of evictions. In the Oud Zuid and Oost/Watergraafsmeer districts, Dynamo, PuurZuid and Eigen Kracht Centrale (Personal Power Generator) worked towards enhancing the social networks of people facing imminent eviction.

These innovations were the fruit of alliances between professionals from a range of organizations and social work centres, which made use of expertise available from the housing and welfare sectors and from a range of perspectives, including that of clients. Their leading questions were how care workers in housing corporations and social work centres could cooperate with each other in their work, and how professionals and ordinary people from a client's own network could

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cooperate more effectively. This coming together of different perspectives led to the development of a common approach, which was subsequently investigated by professionals from De Karthuizer, the development and training centre for Social Work and Law department of the Hogeschool van Amsterdam. Research was mainly funded by the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science, where resources have been earmarked for the development of institutes of higher professional education as partners in knowledge, capable of supporting innovative practice in the field in a subsidy known as the RAAK fund.⁶ The subsidy that the De Karthuizer centre received was intended to generate three types of knowledge: practical knowledge for professionals working in the field, knowledge that would be useful for the educational institute in educating future professionals, and knowledge of the criteria for success in innovative processes.

If they are to work together towards innovation, professionals must be able to look beyond the boundaries of their own institutes and develop activities that will lead to new insights; doing so requires them to negotiate about new procedures, to implement the expertise of others, to share knowledge and to reflect on the entire process, actively interpreting, adjusting and rearranging new knowledge and skills.

This book, 'Outreach work and imminent eviction: RAAK research', is a report of the results obtained from the examination of these innovations.

The first chapter contains a description of the pilot projects, which brought together care workers from the Blankenberg Foundation and Dynamo for early intervention aimed at preventing threatened evictions. In these interventions, they tried to stay a step ahead of a crisis by getting involved early on the basis of information housing corporations had about their residents' payment problems. Chapter 2 is a report of a later investigation of the long-term effects of these interventions.

The third chapter describes the pilot projects developed by Dynamo and PuurZuid, which made use of the expertise available in the general public, specifically the network of family, friends and neighbours surrounding people with rent payment debts. The expectation was that care workers would be able to provide more effective help using the decision-making model of the Family Group Conference. Additionally, the Family Group Conference would add to the strength of the client perspective, offering scope for a range of definitions for problems and their solutions.

Chapter 4 describes knowledge and methodology aspects of innovation research such as were involved in this project, specifically, the new knowledge of innovation processes and outreach work that this research has brought to light. The project has also helped to define the De Karthuizer centre's core activity more precisely, describing how it can provide support and solidarity for developments in the field that will lead to innovation that will transcend the boundaries between social work institutions.

Finally, Chapter 5 will address the lessons we have learned during the course of the project.

The following people participated in the workgroup for Early Signalling and Knowledge Methodology: Louis Tavecchio (lector in demand-led methodology development), Sandra Trienekens (lector in citizenship and cultural dynamics), Paulina Sedney, Rosalie Metze and Susanne Hauwert (research interns), Frans Hubbard (senior researcher), Tineke Bouwes and Marc Räkens (social workers/liason managers between training and field), Carolien de Jong (Eropaf! Foundation), Jeroen Rous (policy officer for the Amsterdam Federation of Housing Corporations), René Blikendaal (organizational manager) and Martin Stam (project head for RAAK-Eropaf).

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1. This will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 4.
2. *Het beroepsprofiel van de maatschappelijk werker (The Professional Profile of the Social Worker)* a publication of the Dutch Association of Social Workers, Utrecht, 2006.
3. See Räkera, Marc, Jos van der Lans and Niek Medema: *Bemoeien werkt (Interference works)*: Amsterdam, De Balie, 1994.
4. Räkera, Marc and Carolien de Jong (ed.): *Eropaf (Get to it)*: Amsterdam, Van Gennep, 2006.
5. Ronald van der Lugt has examined this in connection with this RAAK research project. He describes how greatly the effectiveness and results of Eropaf interventions are enhanced by close cooperation between housing corporations and social workers, for instance by carrying out joint home visits. Another important finding is that Eropaf does not provide for clear and adequate registration, which makes it difficult to produce reliable statistical information.
6. This research was carried out with the support of a subsidy provided by the RAAK public research fund for higher professional education (see www.innovatie-alliantie.nl). Research reports for Eropaf and Family Group Conferences will be published late in 2008, together with the results of research carried out by Ronald van der Lugt.



1 Vroeg-Eropaf and threatened eviction

“We don’t live here,” I said, shaking his hand. “We work for HVO-Querido, and are here to provide support for this client. Ms De Haan is over there.” I pointed towards the living room, where Ms De Haan sat slumped in a chair, an unlit cigarette hanging dejectedly from her lips. “Right, Ms De Haan,” said the bailiff. “You did know that we would finally come? I handed you the court order just last week. I see you haven’t done any packing: have you at least gathered up your personal effects? Or do you have the amount of, let me see, three thousand, eight hundred and thirty-nine Euros and twenty-seven cents for me?” Ms De Haan shook her head and gestured towards a large shopping bag. “Is everything in it?” asked the bailiff, “ID card, insurance card, bank records, that kind of thing? It will be a lot easier if you take all that with you now.” Ms De Haan was uncertain; until a few minutes ago she had not believed that it would really come to this. In spite of herself, she had continued to hope for a miracle. The bailiff gave then us five minutes ‘for free’, to help our client gather her remaining personal effects.⁷

It used to be the case that people who fell behind in rent payments, and who could not seek out help of their own accord, were evicted from their homes with no further ado and without help. Some of them ended up on the streets; in Amsterdam the Salvation Army and HVO-Querido (a support organization for the homeless) provided assistance. The number of homeless people continued to grow until finally, in 1997, representatives of these two organizations rang the alarm bell. Forming a brigade, they called themselves the Flying Dutchman; whenever eviction threatened, they raced to the scene on their bicycles. They may have been the first care workers to start using mobile phones for their work, doing what they could from the client’s home in order to prevent eviction at the last minute. The brigade was too late to prevent Ms De Haan’s eviction: in many cases, there was not

enough time between a court ruling and the actual eviction to allow clients to organize their effects or prevent eviction from taking place. Debt then became insurmountable, a situation which inevitably led to situations of serious stress and, in spite of the best efforts of the Flying Dutchman, to the ultimate failure: eviction.

The Flying Dutchman’s approach was geared towards offering support before eviction had occurred. Team members discovered that many of their clients had no recourse to any kind of help or assistance, even though many evictions could have been prevented with the assistance of care workers. What type of people was the Flying Dutchman team able to reach? Many of them are care avoiders, people who have lost their faith in organized care, and who prefer not to be helped. Others are people who do look for help, but who fail to complete help and assistance programmes (care quitters), or those who would like to receive help but who have not been able to find it.

In the view of the Flying Dutchman, this group requires a completely different approach from what is normally used, as they cannot be expected to produce an articulate request for help, delivered enthusiastically and with determination – and during office hours to boot – so that they can take their own problems to hand. In order to reach them, care workers had to seek them out, as members of the Flying Dutchman did when they jumped on their bikes at the announcement of a threatened eviction. In the beginning, they responded to calls that they received by chance, but later received the support of bailiffs who were willing to tip them off (including the bailiffs and legal personnel at Hoeden/Mulder). Once informed, they would travel to the address and knock on the door, offering help. Often things were already in such a state of crisis that eviction was literally minutes away. First of all, relevant documents were rounded up, such as loan applications for the

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municipal social services department and paperwork for the debt relief agency; then calls were made to the municipal bank to arrange repayment terms, to the housing corporation for special arrangements and to the organization handling receivership.⁸ Once the eviction itself was prevented, a second help phase began in which team members worked together with the client to determine the best kind of professional help to call in or, alternatively, how to activate the client's existing help networks to provide assistance with the problems that had originally led to the threat of eviction.

It was clear from the start that the Flying Dutchman team would not be given a long-term mandate in Amsterdam, as the project had been set up as a repair measure for gaps in existing care programmes. Between 2005 and 2006, the Flying Dutchman passed on the expertise for the Eropaf method to all social work organizations in Amsterdam, who organized their care so that the method could be implemented. Staff received additional training and registration and funding procedures were taken on.

These measures were necessary because of the specific requirements of the Eropaf method for service organizations: because it is a flexible system with few pre-set procedures, care workers have a relatively broad scope of discretionary action,⁹ allowing them to take decisions quickly and confidently in complex situations and in unusual situations for which standard solutions are not readily at hand. That the team's expertise should be transferred to the social work sector was an obvious choice, since both social work and debt relief are centred at the very local level. As a result, they are familiar with the local social welfare services, know how and where to reach the clients who need them and in fact already have a degree of the expertise they need, so that care can be organized from as close to the client as possible.

Since 2007, the Eropaf methodology has become so integrated into social work that it is now time to begin experimenting with expanding its scope. One of the priority areas for explo-



ration was the crisis situation of impending eviction: care workers were arriving on clients' doorsteps at nearly the same time that the bailiffs were arriving with the receivers and the skip being set down to carry off the rest. Could this crisis have been scaled down? Could the client have been reached earlier in order to avoid eviction from taking place? How could care workers or service organizations find out where help would be needed? Would clients understand the severity of the situation once they had developed rent arrears of two months, and would they agree to cooperate? Who should cooperate in order to work towards preventing people being evicted from their homes? A number of social service organizations in Amsterdam joined forces to address these questions using the Vroegmeldingen ('Early Alert') and Vroeg-Eropaf methodologies.¹⁰

1.1 Vroeg-Eropaf

Vroeg-Eropaf is part of an integrated, outreach-oriented care methodology, in which social service providers and housing corporations work together to reach people with rent arrears earlier, starting at the point when rent has gone unpaid for a period of two months instead of waiting until an eviction

notice is served. In this way, financial problems are not yet out of control and the underlying problems which caused the situation can be addressed and eviction more easily prevented.

In 2007, a few of the Amsterdam city districts experimented with various types of Vroeg-Eropaf projects with the aim of reducing the number of people becoming homeless as a result of eviction. The De Karthuizer centre tracked two of these pilot projects, one in the city centre and one in the Oost/Watergraafsmeer district. Two social service organizations allowed their activities to be followed closely during the study, entering into dialogue regarding their approach, accepting critical discussion of their work and allowing outside participants to consider how their pro-active methodology could best be implemented into mainstream social work practice. Using a system of hands-on research, the De Karthuizer centre produced profiles of the working methodology, implementation processes, criteria for success and client range.

In doing this, the researchers did not remain at a distance but instead became closely involved in searching for solutions and determining the most effective working methodology for the professionals at work. An additional result of the research was new knowledge of how organizations can best cooperate with each other, even when this cooperation may not at first be obvious, such as between housing corporations and social work or between social work and debt relief agencies.

New insights into cooperation across these traditional boundaries serves to illuminate methodology structures in bottom-up innovations, as well as a number of the stimulating and limiting factors at work in these collaborative approaches. The research also revealed a number of friction factors that can be present in innovative collaboration. These include how new knowledge is used and who is the 'owner'

of this knowledge, but also the fact that there will inevitably be a variance of both interests and visions during collaboration, some of which will only come to light during the development and implementation of new practice.

1.2 Vroeg-Eropaf methodology

Vroeg-Eropaf shares the Eropaf methodology but is focussed more on prevention, advancing the moment of intervention to a point before a situation becomes one of crisis. An example of this is in cases of rent arrears: in the Vroeg-Eropaf methodology, a tenant is approached when rent has remained unpaid for two months, before the possibility of eviction arises. Housing corporations provide an overview of tenants with rent arrears of two months, from which the Vroeg-Eropaf team selects a number for home visits. An interesting question for the researchers was how this selection was made: which tenants should they visit, and which not? It emerged that teams in the city centre and Oost/Watergraafsmeer districts had different ideas about this.

In the Vroeg-Eropaf pilot project in the city centre district, the Blankenberg Foundation (a social work organization for Amsterdam's city centre and Westerpark districts) worked together with three housing corporations, De Alliantie, Eigen Haard and Ymere. In a first step, the housing corporation was the first to contact tenants when rent arrears reached the two-month mark. If they were unsuccessful, they passed on the list of selected tenants to the Blankenberg Foundation. These were often tenants about whom the corporation's collection office had little background information. The social work organization then sent these tenants an invitation to visit their office. If there was no response, a dual team of social worker and debt relief worker visited the tenant at home. This is the same approach as the crisis intervention prescribed by Eropaf. During the visit, the team explained what kind of help was available through social work, and provided referrals to other sources of help as necessary. They

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also did their best to come to realistic and appropriate payment terms between the tenant and the housing corporation.

In the Vroeg-Eropaf project in the Transvaal neighbourhood of the Oost/Watergraafsmeer district, the social work organization Dynamo worked together with housing corporation Ymere. The housing consultant formulated a list of tenants with two-months arrears and took the list to the debt relief agency. Together, they established which tenants had already agreed payments terms with the housing corporation or were participating in a social work programme organized by Dynamo. All others received a visit from the housing consultant and the debt relief worker. The housing consultant discussed the rent arrears with the tenant and suggested realistic and appropriate payment terms; the debt relief worker examined the financial situation together with the tenant and took note of any social, emotional and/or behavioural problems and, if necessary, referred the tenant to another organization for further assistance. If debts were severe, the debt relief worker also arranged further in-office appointments during which this problem could be addressed.



1.3 Research

The Vroeg-Eropaf research pilots took place in the city centre district and the Transvaal neighbourhood from January to November 2007. In the pilot projects, housing corporations and social work organizations learned how to work together towards preventing evictions. With this aim in mind, it was important that both parties understood the importance of early intervention, and that they realized that they urgently needed to work together at all levels, from management to field work. This was the main focus of all Vroeg-Eropaf projects.

The Vroeg-Eropaf pilot project for the city centre began in January 2007. Here, it was quickly evident that it would be impossible to meet the previously set goal of one hundred home visits within six months, as the housing corporations participating in this district reported only two evictions and very few tenants with two months of rent arrears. As a result, another Vroeg-Eropaf pilot was added in the Transvaal neighbourhood (Vroeg-Eropaf in de Transvaal); this pilot began in March 2007. Adding this project was beneficial for the research as a whole, as the very different approaches of the two pilots provided plenty of scope for comparison. After all, the success of an approach is dependent on the cooperation of the various participants.

This research was initiated and coordinated by the Foundation for Cooperation and Development in Social Work (SOM) and the Amsterdam Federation of Housing Corporations (AFWC), who commissioned the De Karthuiser centre to carry it out. The Eropaf steering committee set up a framework for the expansion of existing Eropaf methodology to include Vroeg-Eropaf, thereby guaranteeing the link between the areas of expertise of both housing corporations and social work organizations. Representatives from AFWC, SOM and the De Karthuiser centre were included in the steering committee, as well as the chairman of the convention of directors of social services institutions. From time to time, the steering committee



called together a sounding board group (known as the Eropaf Network Amsterdam, or ENA) consisting of other interested parties such as various municipal service departments,¹¹ HVO-Querido (serving the homeless), bailiffs and the municipal bank.

1.4 Research contexts

Both the pilot and the research were influenced by urban developments. Before the start of the city centre and Transvaal neighbourhood pilots, the Vroeg-Eropaf approach had been tried in the Amsterdam North district; that pilot had revealed obstacles and pitfalls that would best be avoided in future pilots, and which influenced the way the new pilot projects were set up. For example, Doras, the social work organization in the North district, found itself unable to cope with the overwhelming number of requests for help. As a result, when new pilots were set up, more attention was paid to the volume of requests that a social work organization could cope with. New Vroeg-Eropaf pilots were set up more or less concurrently with the city centre and Transvaal neighbourhood pilots, now in the South East and North districts, and each had a different structure.

The project in the North district received more attention than the others, in part because it took place under the auspices of the municipal authorities, who made participation more or less mandatory. The housing corporations and social work organizations also signed a contract initiated by the municipal authorities. This project was so successful that the Department for Work and Income (Dienst Werk en Inkomen), whose task it was to introduce Vroeg-Eropaf throughout the city, was convinced that this was the best way to go to work.

Even so, parties involved in Vroeg-Eropaf projects in other districts were also satisfied with their own experiences, and felt that the successes and failures of all methods should be registered and compared so that the North district project could profit from those as well. After all, it had always been the De Karthuizer centre's intention to contribute to the development of good methodology for Vroeg-Eropaf, together with the partners in innovation who carried out research into the pilots in the city centre district and the Transvaal neighbourhood. This in turn led to a situation in which unconditional openness could develop between the housing corporations and the social work organizations.

1.5 Research methodology

The Karthuizer research focussed on the development and implementation of Vroeg-Eropaf in two city districts. From start to finish, researchers¹² followed developments closely, reporting interim results to fieldworkers and managers of both pilots from time to time in the form of feedback. They also shared their thoughts on how the programme could be implemented and improved, guided by the problems faced by project staff. They worked with information acquired during evaluation discussions, starting and end assessments, meetings of RAAK representatives,¹³ interviews with professionals involved in the projects and an expert meeting in which staff and management of housing corporations and

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social work organizations from all city districts met to exchange knowledge acquired during the Eropaf and Vroeg-Eropaf projects.

Research focussed on a number of themes. Which tenants would Vroeg-Eropaf be able to reach? Which procedures should be used, and what would be the benefits and drawbacks of each? What kind of cooperation would there be between social work organizations and housing corporations? What would be the noticeable and measurable results of the pilot projects? What successes and failures would be associated with the various procedures?

In the period during which researchers followed the two pilot projects, 86 tenants were registered as Vroeg-Eropaf clients. Of these, 59 received a home visit and 18 made contact with care workers through another channel, such as by telephone or by visiting an office. During the same period, fewer than one in ten tenants registered as participating in the projects had dealings with bailiffs, and none of the participating housing corporations in any of the districts evicted any of these tenants.

1.6 Results

The most important results fall into two categories. The first is knowledge of the process, such as cooperation, evaluation, harmonization, decision-making and regulation, and the second is knowledge of the Vroeg-Eropaf methodology itself. The following is a description of the salient points of the development and implementation processes in Vroeg-Eropaf methodology.

1.6.1 Success

One success was that housing corporations and social work organizations, usually opposing parties, were able to enter into dialogue and cooperate with each other, which allowed them insight into each other's organizations, visions and working methods. From the beginning, the intention was to make better use of each other's expertise and background information in order to provide the best possible help to beneficiaries (for housing corporations this meant tenants, and for social work organizations, potential clients). Enormous strides were made in cementing this relationship, and results confirmed that the parties were on the right track and that opportunities were available to enhance it further.

There were also important advances with regard to encouraging innovative practice from the bottom up, and the pilots allowed for development of methodologies in this direction. Because the projects were set up as pilot schemes, there was plenty of scope for experimentation with a range of working methods. Additionally, working across boundaries within teams and between organizations contributed to the search for solutions as well as hands-on implementation of new working methods. Another source of support was knowledge emerging from a parallel research activities in other pilot projects. Participants cooperated in pondering problems, establishing strengths and weaknesses,



and allowed each other the freedom to make use of their own expertise and to look for solutions to problems in the scope of daily practice.

1.6.2 Points of special attention

In addition to the various successes, there were also other interesting points of learning experience. However obvious it may seem, regular consultation between parties turned out to be an important factor in efficient collaboration, as did the development of a sense of ownership by pilot participants. Ownership is intertwined with participants' passion, involvement and dynamic processes, and is essential to the emergence of innovation. In particular, meetings during which each participant was able to demonstrate partial responsibility for a project's success were beneficial in establishing common ground; they also showed that Vroeg-Eropaf was not just a nice idea but something in which people were prepared to invest their energy. About the preparatory phase, in which plans were drawn up for a common approach, a staff member at housing corporation Ymere remarked, "During the start-up phase, I wrote some memos which I e-mailed to the coordinator at Dynamo; she looked them over and then returned

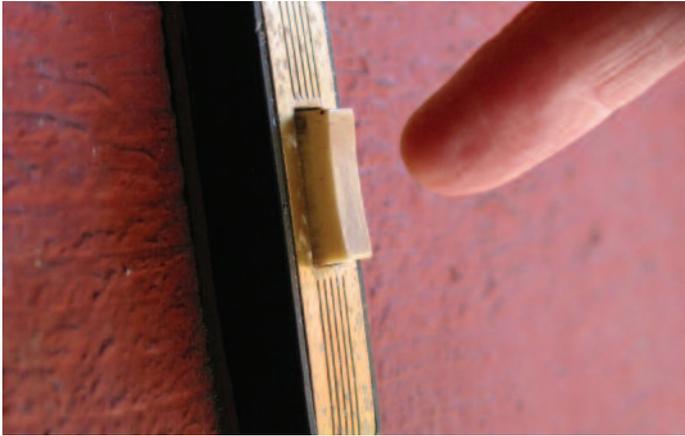
them to me with her questions and comments. In this way, we were quickly able to put together a reasonable piece of work, which I in turn discussed with my superior."

Communication remains a point of special attention: whenever people come together from different organizational cultures, interests and with different assumptions, misunderstandings and differences of opinion can occur. It was noticeable that social work organizations and housing corporations each had their own way of expressing things. A simple yet illustrative example of this is the fact that a social worker would refer to a client as 'Ms B.', while for housing corporation staff she was 'file 2'. Semantic differences can represent differences in perceptions of reality that must be bridged by effective communication.

Another important learning outcome is that misunderstandings and conflicts can only be prevented when everyone involved keeps in mind the benefits that their cooperation will have for their joint clients. This realization was an important element in reducing misunderstandings and conflicts in a beginning partnership. Successful cooperation and exchange of knowledge between organizations required open communication.

Another learning outcome that was important to this collaborative approach that it was important that care workers themselves understand the principles of outreach work, and that their work must reflect this. However, this is only possible with full support and encouragement from management, and the idea of support is not limited to supplying practical aids such as bicycles or mobile telephones. Field workers need meetings and peer consultation in order to exchange their newly acquired knowledge with colleagues. This too is not limited to an exchange of practical business, tips and success stories, but must include opportunities to share disappointment, doubts and uncertainty. For this to be possible, there must be an atmosphere in which

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professionals are not called to order for their mistakes but instead can engage in open and constructive reflection on the problems they face in their work.

Some of these problems are too fundamental and complex for immediate elimination, and questions and dilemmas are diverse. How can I make my work transparent for my superiors, for funding bodies and for my professional partners? How can I safeguard my clients' privacy? What is the most promising moment for activities aimed at prevention? Should all social work staff take part in this type of intensive intervention, or only the ones who enjoy it and are good at it? How can we register our results effectively and efficiently, but without allowing work guidelines to restrict our experimentation unnecessarily?

These are pressing questions, but they cannot be answered in a single discussion or with one-off solutions. Both staff members and their superiors need a safe environment and time to learn together; in other words, to find common ground, evaluate results and let go of outdated presumptions and expectations.

1.6.3 Advances in the development of methodologies

What can we learn from this research into Vroeg-Eropaf methodology? The most important knowledge that has emerged is concentrated around the client population, which is difficult to define, and the expansion of support facilities.

The first thing that became evident was that two heads were better than one: both housing corporations and social work organizations harbour a wealth of knowledge and information about how to tackle problems faced by people with rent arrears quickly and efficiently. This knowledge and information is complementary, as is the scope of their intervention. As a result, both are well served by selecting tenants for home visits.

The situation in which housing corporations preselect tenants and simply send a list through to the social work organization, such as was the case in the city centre project, is a one-sided approach. In fact, it is much more effective if a housing corporation and social work organization go through the list together, exchanging the background information each already has, as Dynamo and Ymere did.



Another factor that produced a positive effect was letting staff design and organize their working methods themselves, allowing them scope for experimentation when they encountered problems. An example of this is the question of how to reach tenants who ignore post, or simply leave it unopened. And what to do if no one is at home at the time of the home visit? Sending letters by post was unsuccessful, but an informal note, slipped under the door without an envelope, was just enough incentive for tenants to get in touch with the housing corporation or social work organization.

Who did the Vroeg-Eropaf projects reach? The group of tenants who develop rent arrears is highly diverse and includes all age groups, men and women, local and migrant populations, single people and families. Consequently, it was impossible to establish a typical client profile during these projects. However, it is possible to differentiate according to the size of the debt and the number of creditors. Some

people had minor arrears and stated that they did not need any help, while others were dealing with up to five creditors and how no idea how to handle the situation. The latter group especially appreciated having been offered help without having had to ask for it.

Home visits turned out to be a source of invaluable information which could be used to organize a follow-up programme within the social work organization, or with which a client could be referred to another organization. After the home visit, the client can visit the social work office for further guidance if he likes. However, the reality is that many clients continue to avoid care, not turning up at scheduled office appointments or at the offices of organizations to which they have been referred. Possible solutions to this problem, such as activating clients' social networks, will be discussed in Chapter 3.

7. From *Outreachend samenwerken (Collaboration in outreach work)*, Carolien de Jong and Marc Räckers (ed.), Amsterdam, 2006.
8. Administration: a form of supervision in which an administrator manages all or part of an adult's financial affairs so as to create a situation of stability and calm in that person's financial situation.
9. Discretionary freedom: freedom to act within a framework of established rules and protocol.
10. Both terms are used in the Amsterdam pilot projects. For clarity's sake, we use only 'Vroeg-Eropaf' in this document.
11. Dienst Werk en Inkomen (DWI): Department of Work and Income; Dienst Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling (DMO), Department for Social Development; Dienst Zorg en Samenleving (DZS), Department for Society and Welfare; Gemeentelijke Geneeskundige en Gezondheidsdienst (GGD), Municipal Medical and Health Service.
12. Researchers were Susanne Hauwert, Paulina Sedney and Rosalie Metze; during the period in which research took place at the De Karthuizer centre they were employed as research interns (HOIO) at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam.
13. RAAK meetings were organized approximately once every six weeks by the initiators of the three projects funded by RAAK subsidies: Vroeg-Eropaf, Family Group Conferences for Eropaf and Kennismethodiek, all of which are discussed in this document.



2 Vroeg-Eropaf six months to one year later

During the time that the social work organizations and housing corporations were working with *Vroeg-Eropaf in the Transvaal neighbourhood*, questions arose as to the long-term effects of early intervention. During evaluation discussions as well as interviews held by researchers, a number of people suggested that intervention at the point of two months' rent arrears might be too soon.

When approached, tenants responded to home visits by paying their arrears, and some of them got in touch with social workers, but did this mean that problems, including payment problems, would be prevented over the long term? Because this question came up so often during discussions of pilot methodology, one of our recommendations was to conduct further research with the aim of addressing it.

Housing corporation Ymere took this advice to heart and asked us to conduct this additional research, concentrating on tenants' experiences of Vroeg-Eropaf interventions and the effects it had had on their financial and personal situations.

2.1 Research

In the subsequent research project, the main question was *whether or not tenants' situations had changed, either for the better or for the worse, within six months after home visits were carried out by social workers and representatives of housing corporations during the Vroeg-Eropaf pilot project in the Transvaal neighbourhood.*

This section answers this question based on information collected from client files and during home visits. The entire research project, including quantitative analysis of the conclusion, was published along with other Eropaf research results at the end of 2008 as part of the RAAK project.

2.2 A personal approach

The most important conclusion is that it seems to make little difference whether the debt relief worker and the housing consultant arrive after two or three months rent arrears have built up, as long as the visit takes place. Nearly all tenants, when asked, stated that they appreciated the personal approach and the opportunity to talk about their problems, as well as possible solutions, with people from the social work organization and the housing corporation rather than simply deal impersonally with the organizations.

This subsequent research also included home visits, which were this time carried out by a researcher and a housing consultant, and most tenants appreciated these visits as well. Tenants recognized the housing consultant from the first visit, and the housing consultant was already aware of existing problems and therefore able to respond to the tenant's individual situation. This is not only important during the home visit but also afterwards. Tenants appreciate a personal approach, a human face as a representative of the corporation and, where relevant, from the social work organization; they need to know they can rely on these people. When then have questions or encounter problems, they ask for this person by name, preferring not to speak by telephone or at home with someone they have never met before and to whom they would have to explain their situation yet again.

2.3 Home visit: rule and exception

In some cases, a single home visit is not enough. A small number of clients simply do not 'fit into the system', as one housing consultant put it. They are consistently late in making payments, not out of choice but precisely because they have no choice. If someone from the housing corporation is aware

Vroeg-Eropaf six months to one year later

of this and of the tenant's background information, knows that the tenant will eventually pay and is willing to allow a bit more time or attention, chances are good that the bailiffs will not need to be called in. Because this group is only a small percentage of the total number of people with rent arrears, it is not to be expected that they will require a large investment of extra time from the housing corporation's representative.

2.4 Home visit after two months or three?

In order to determine the best time for a home visit, it is more useful to examine efficiency and effectiveness. Tenants with rent arrears of two months are often able to get a grip on their problems without the need for intensive intervention. Once arrears are up to three months, bailiff's fees tend to be added to the amount owing; tenants who receive home visits are often really in need of help. For these reasons, it is often useful for housing corporations to delay home visits until arrears stand at three months. If the housing corporation agrees to absorb bailiff's fees itself, tenants are not burdened with further expense. Housing corporations can assume that the cost of doing this will be more than compensated, since reducing the number of home visits, and delaying those visits, will help to reduce expenses generally.

For social work as well, a delay until three months also seems more effective. Delaying home visits until three months have passed means that people who can solve their problems themselves will have already done so, leaving only those tenants who actually need help. Additionally, the prospect of impending dealings with the bailiff adds pressure. If the housing corporation offers to pay bailiff's fees in exchange for the tenant agreeing to accept help, this could be enough to convince tenants to cooperate with social workers.

2.5 Demonstrable effects in the long term

The home visit scheme ensures that tenants know who they can contact should problems arise in connection with rent payments or other matters. They also receive information about what to do if they are late with rent payments, and about the support they can get from social services. All in all, this approach led to a situation in which fewer than half of tenants visited ultimately ended up at the bailiff's – certainly a different outcome than could be expected if no visits had taken place, and one which entailed much less work for the housing corporations.

The home visits have also created a new client population for social work organizations. A large number of tenants interviewed in connection with the research stated that they had been previously unaware of the existence of the social work organization. Now and in the future, however, they will be better able to find the support they need from social work.

2.6 Home visit by housing consultant?

Who is the best person to carry out a home visit? This research showed that, for a range of reasons, it was useful for a housing consultant to take part in home visits. First of all, it gave the housing corporation a human face. Most tenants remembered the consultant they met during the first home visit, and if they had questions or problems later they could contact someone who was already familiar with their situation. Another advantage of having a housing consultant present was that it made it easier to justify the visit itself, as he (or she) had an obvious reason, namely rent arrears, for coming, and no need to explain how this information had been obtained. Still another reason was that a housing consultant can easily gain access to common areas and entryways, making it possible to get directly to the tenant's own door. It happened a number of times that tenants refused or failed to open an outer door when the bell was

rung, but did open their own doors when we knocked on them. Finally, housing consultants were able to provide useful information about tenants' payment history, which in turn provided insight into the severity of their problems.

A disadvantage, however, is that tenants may be hesitant in providing information if a representative of the housing corporation is present. Although the housing consultant carries out the home visit because of concerns for the tenant's welfare, he or she cannot turn a blind eye to any irregular or unauthorized situations that may come to light. If this is a concern for the tenant, it can stand in the way of the consultant's providing help.

2.7 Home visit by debt relief worker?

Home visits after two months showed little advantage in terms of debt relief. However, the information that social workers have about tenants with two months of rent arrears can be useful during preliminary consultations, as this information, together with the housing corporation's payment records, gives a fairly complete picture of their situations which can be helpful in making decision about subsequent interventions.

It is also useful for the debt relief worker to be present during home visits. Very few tenants entered into a care programme as a direct result of a home visit, but the fact of having met a care worker during a home visit gives social work a human face and makes it easier for people to seek out help. This effect would probably be further enhanced if home visits were carried out after three months instead of two.

2.8 Recommendations

On the basis of client file research and home visits, our recommendations are as follows:

- Carry on with Vroeg-Eropaf, with home visits conducted by a housing consultant and a debt relief worker so that the expertise of both can be fully exploited;

- Plan a home visit once a tenant has rent arrears of three months. This will help to ensure that the people who really need help will receive it;
- Use additional information and subsequent investigation to decide whether it would be more effective and efficient to conduct a home visit after two or three months of rent arrears.;
- Housing corporations should absorb bailiff's fees for a tenant with three months of arrears in return for the tenant's agreeing to cooperate with the debt relief agency. The expense this involves will be compensated by later and less frequent home visits, and it will also help avoid extra expense for tenants themselves;
- In each neighbourhood, establish one contact person from the social work organization and one the housing corporation who are familiar with the situations of those tenants who need special attention;
- Approaches for tenants with rent arrears of two months can be less assertive, for example a telephone call or a letter containing the name of the contact person and a request to get in touch in connection with the rent arrears.



3 Family Group Conference for threatened eviction

In addition to investigating how evictions could be prevented, another aspect of this research was to evaluate what a Family Group Conference can contribute. A Family Group Conference makes use of people's own social networks, specifically those tenants who are facing imminent eviction as a result of rent arrears (in other words, the same client population as Eropaf). This chapter describes the results of that research. First, we explain some of the important concepts, such as the Family Group Conference, and then we describe the project as it was formulated in the first research proposal. Finally, we present the results: what lessons can be learned from both positive and negative experiences?

3.1 Family Group Conference in brief

A Family Group Conference can be provided by the Eigen Kracht Centrale upon request. From the headquarters in Zwolle, the Netherlands, coordinators are trained and can be sent out to conduct Family Group Conferences. What makes this research especially interesting for them is that Eropaf clients are also a new client population for Family Group Conferences. Social work organizations that organize Family Group Conferences would acquire tools with which they could tackle the root causes of their clients' debts better and more permanently.

With Family Group Conferences, care workers no longer need to conceive and formulate a care plan. Instead, this is done during a one-off conference consisting of the client and his or her friends, family and neighbours. Clients decide for themselves who will be present, choosing people they trust to consult about their lives. In selecting and inviting participants, choosing a location and establishing the central dilemma to

be addressed during the conference, clients receive support from an independent coordinator, preferably not a care worker. The purpose of a Family Group Conference is to unify and enhance a client's social network so that people can think together about the client's life can be improved. A plan is drawn up based on the outcome of the discussions, and tasks are assigned to care workers; family members and friends can and should also provide practical, social and emotional support. The strength of this approach is that the plan is designed by the people it affects: the client is the 'owner' of the plan and, as such, is responsible for its execution.

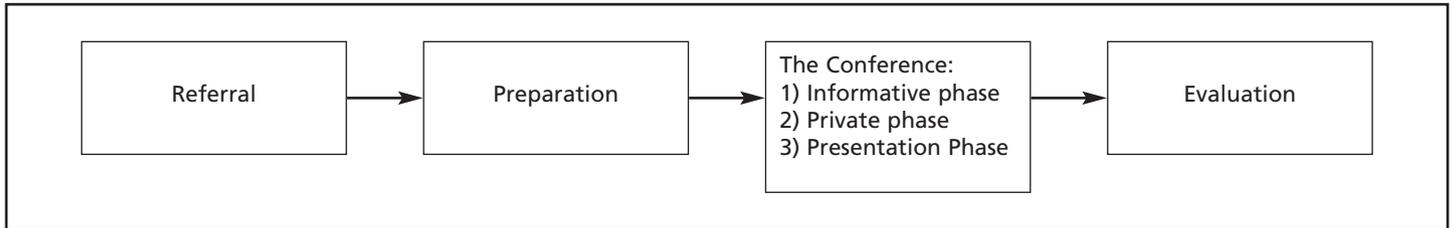
3.2 Family Group Conference procedure

A Family Group Conference consists of a number of phases which we have diagrammed and explained below.

3.2.1 Registration

In general, it is the client's main care worker who registers him or her for an Family Group Conference, but clients can also register themselves, or someone from their network can do so. A registration form is submitted to the Eigen Kracht Centrale, providing information about the client's problems and the type of coordinator that the client thinks would be a good match for himself and his network. The Eigen Kracht Centrale trains coordinators to organize Family Group Conferences, to motivate people to participate constructively and to make sure the conference proceeds as it should. Ideally, coordinators come from a similar social and cultural background as their clients and the clients' networks, making it easier to sympathize with their way of thinking and their needs.

Family Group Conference for threatened eviction



3.2.2 Preparation

The coordinator helps to establish the central questions for the conference and to define the social network. There are many possibilities for central questions. How can this client stay in his home? How can his network provide the support he needs to overcome his debts? How can the ties between this client and his network be strengthened? After the central question has been established, either the coordinator or the client approaches members of the client's network, explaining the situation and asking them to think along to find solutions to the client's problems.

If necessary, the care worker can contribute by inviting other professionals to attend the first phase of the conference and provide information about the various forms of help that are available. Finally, a day, time and location are chosen and invitations are sent out.

3.2.3 The Conference

The Family Group Conference has three phases. During the preliminary informative phase, there is a discussion of the problems the client is presently facing and what he or she thinks is important, and members of the client's network have a chance to express their opinions about the situation. If professional care workers have been invited to the meeting, they explain what their own expertise and that of their organizations can contribute to a solution. Who these

professionals are depends on the situation: if children are involved there could be a representative from a youth welfare agency; a debt relief worker can assist with debts; social workers can provide assistance in the case of psychological problems. Everyone present is given the opportunity to ask any questions they have.

In the second phase, the client and his social network develop a plan based on information provided by care workers and the coordinator, who are not present while the plan is being drawn up. Instead, it is up to the social network to discuss the situation, weigh up various options and make decisions without the interference of professionals.

The coordinator and care workers then return for the third phase and the plan is presented to them. They assess how realistic and practical the plan is and whether or not it will sufficiently safeguard the client's safety. The networks look at the need for professional help, deciding which tasks they will delegate to professionals and which they will shoulder themselves.

3.2.4 Evaluation

Progress is evaluated after a period set by the network, usually between three weeks and three months. If necessary, the plan can be adjusted or changed. Although a care worker may be present if the network wishes, this is not mandatory: from start to finish, the client and his network remain responsible for the plan at all times.

Family Group Conference for threatened eviction

3.3 Origin and development of the Family Group Conference

The Family Group Conference originated in a decision-making model that has been used for centuries by the Maoris of New Zealand. With this procedure, a family or even an entire village could work out solutions to problems they had with their children. In the nineteen-eighties, it became clear that New Zealand's youth care structures were not complementary to Maori culture, with the result that more Maori children were taken into care than should have been necessary. As youth care organizations began to take Maori traditions of planning and decision-making into account, the results of their work with this population improved. This improvement was so dramatic that the Family Group Conference became a form of help that all New Zealand families were entitled to use.

Research confirmed that clients and their networks could be entrusted with making their own plans; in 93% of cases, plans were approved by the care workers involved (Sundell et al., 2001: 328), who found them well-founded and safe. Although results had only been examined over a short period of time, they were encouraging, and the methodology was introduced in a range of countries including Australia, Canada, the United States, the UK, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands.

Although the model has only been used in its original youth care context in most of these countries, elsewhere experiments have been carried out with other population groups, such as the elderly. This is now ongoing in the Netherlands, where in addition to use with the Eropaf client population, Family Group Conferences have been used by victims of domestic abuse and people with physical and intellectual disabilities, albeit on a small scale. On a national level, the Family Group Conference has only been used in youth care, and even there it is far from standard practice. This is an



indication of how little use has been made of the method. Little is known about how Family Group Conferences are or could be used outside of youth care, and much is yet to be learned about the best time to implement them in cases of threatened eviction.

In the Dutch political arena, the predominant opinion of Family Group Conferences is positive. The Social Support Act (*Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning*, or WMO) entered into effect at the beginning of 2007. The aim of this Act is for all people to be able to participate in society, regardless of age, ability level or the existence of any limiting factors (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 2004:7). People should be self-reliant to the greatest possible extent, when necessary with help from those around them, rather than being dependent on government services. Service organizations come into the picture only when individuals and their social networks are unable to meet the need for care.

The concept of the Family Group Conference is complementary to this ideal, as it is a forum in which clients and their networks can themselves decide what the best help will be. Research in the youth welfare sector has confirmed that 80%

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of responsibility is shouldered by people from the client's own network (van Beek, 2003: 56). Family Group Conferences can help shift responsibility from professional care towards informal help. This not only enhances general social cohesion but also results in major savings in terms of government spending. All of this helps to explain the fact that the government is increasingly prepared to invest in the implementation of Family Group Conferences in the context of youth welfare as well as in other care and welfare settings.

3.4 Project and research

The above is the context of the pilot project described in this report: Family Group Conferences for Eropaf clients. This project and the accompanying research took place from May 2007 until May 2008. In the course of the project, social workers from the Amsterdam social work organizations PuurZuid and Dynamo received training from the Eigen Kracht Centrale so that they could work with the Family Group Conference methodology.

How did the idea develop that calling in the help of a client's social network would have a positive influence? There are a number of explanations, the first of which concerns the nature of this client population and the central tenets of the Family Group Conference model. Often, Eropaf clients are socially isolated, and live on an income from benefit schemes in rented government housing. They face a range of stubborn problems with financial, emotional and social issues, and often these problems are multiple and complex. It is precisely the stubbornness of their problems that makes it difficult for social workers to provide adequate and appropriate help. Clients give up halfway, have to be chased up, do not stay in touch; this cycle continues until eviction is once again just around the corner.

This was a reason for a new approach: the Family Group Conference. This model seemed a good tool with which to reinforce the weakening social network of these clients who so often live in isolation, and so to establish a source of long-term informal support.

Another reason to try Family Group Conferences with Eropaf clients is the increased workload for social workers that is part of Eropaf methodology. Four years ago, all Amsterdam social work organizations began actively approaching people for whom eviction from their homes seemed imminent (see Chapter 1). Already facing a heavy workload, they often had to drop whatever they were doing to conduct a home visit and telephone social services, tax authorities, the municipal bank, the housing corporation and sundry other parties. Even after all this, when eviction had been prevented, the social worker's involvement was not yet completed. Getting a client's life back on track often required more help than a care worker could provide. This is yet another reason that Family Group Conferences can be useful. Friends, neighbours and family members have lasting relationships with the client; they have known him for a long time, can recognize certain behavioural patterns and notice immediately when

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things begin to go wrong and familiar pitfalls beckon. A social network can provide support that is more immediate and requires less intensive professional help.

For this project, three social workers from PuurZuid took part in a specialized training programme geared to presenting and implementing Family Group Conferences. From then on, they offered every Eropaf client the possibility of a Family Group Conference, doing their best to motivate them to agree. This was easier said than done: in the first five months, a coordinator was only called in six cases, and only two of these resulted in a Family Group Conference actually taking place. This is a meagre result, considering that the aim of the pilot was to hold twenty Conferences.¹⁴ During the pilot project, field workers, managers and researchers came together a number of times to discuss possible reasons for the lack of impetus for Family Group Conferences. Another reason for action was that we hoped to gather enough experience to be able to draw valid conclusions from our research. This was finally achieved by adding Dynamo, another social work organization, to the pilot, thereby covering a bigger area and training more social workers so that they could become involved in the project. Ultimately, as a result, seventeen Conferences were initiated, of which eight were finally held.

The researchers were involved in the project from beginning to end. The first step was a series of discussions of the aims and methodology of the project itself as well as the research: who would do what, how, and what was the desired result. Following these discussions it was possible to fill out both the research and the methodology. The research method was participatory, also known as action research, a technique that involves researchers observing and registering information and then immediately bouncing this information back to field workers so that processes can be adjusted and improved as necessary. Data was collected during in-depth personal and telephone interviews with care workers, coordinators and a member of the client's social network, and also during training

sessions, meetings of project heads,¹⁵ special meetings about Family Group Conferences for Eropaf, an evaluation meeting held by PuurZuid and a Family Group Conference. The data collected allows for a virtually complete description of the Family Group Conferences that were initiated and held as well as the extent of the various participants' appreciation of the Conferences.

3.5 Family Group Conference in Eropaf

What changes when a Family Group Conference is added to Eropaf methodology? When notice of a threatened eviction comes in, the same action is taken as in Eropaf: a debt relief worker and a social worker conduct a home visit. What is different is that steps to pay off debts, prevent the eviction taking place and augmenting income are not all set out and partially carried out during the home visit. Instead, the care workers explain the principles of the Family Group Conference, ensuring that the client understands what it entails and that it would be a good way to address the situation at hand. If the client agrees, care workers first check whether urgent action is necessary to put off eviction, and then the client can be registered with Eigen Kracht Centrale. At this point, the coordinator takes over from the care workers, who remain in the background until the Family Group Conference. This pilot provided first-hand experience with this procedure, illuminating a number of factors for success and some less desirable situations. The success stories are described first below, followed by the less successful situations, which nevertheless provided valuable lessons for us.

3.5.1 Success stories

Most of the care workers and coordinators who were involved in the pilot project appreciate the fact that the Family Group Conference makes the nature of the situation clear to the client's network. "Whatever else happens, I am glad that her network, the people she spends most of her time with, knows

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what is going on,” said a social worker from PuurZuid. In many cases, this was not the case before a Family Group Conference had taken place; sometimes family and friends had no idea of the nature and extent of their loved one’s problems. All of the client’s problems were laid bare during the informative phase of the Conference, often presented by the client himself. This was a big step, but one which allowed the client the opportunity to finally discuss the situation openly. With the facts of their problems out in the open, clients were also able to speak frankly about them after the Conference was over, no longer having to explain their situation every time they asked for help. All in all, it meant that clients could rely on more support from their network and no longer had to do everything themselves. One coordinator mentioned a client for whom a Family Group Conference had been held: “It was very important for her that her social network could provide support. Not by giving her money, but by being there for her when she goes through difficult times.”

Even when no Conference was finally held, or when a plan was not carried out as expected, preparing a Family Group Conference turned out to have added value. This could simply be the fact that everyone in a client’s network is made aware of the situation, or that everyone involved afterwards understands “just how major the underlying problems are that need to be sorted out first,” as a social worker from Dynamo put it.

Using Family Group Conferences requires a different way of thinking and working from social workers. Ordinarily there would be an intake meeting to discuss a client’s needs and set out an action plan, but now this task was delegated to the coordinator. They had to let go of the tendency to ‘just take care of a couple of things’ and instead leave action to the client, his network and the coordinator. Although it took them a while to get used to this, and felt odd at the start, it turned out to be educational, interesting and even pleasant.

What they found was that social workers had to actually experience a Family Group Conference to understand how much added value it had. A social worker from Dynamo said that, at one point, she realized that a client’s network knows a lot more than a social worker ever could. In other words, the social network’s knowledge and expertise is at least as valuable as the professional expertise of a social worker. Often, people assume that Eropaf clients do not have a social network, or that they have lost touch with their network, because of the isolated lives they lead. Still, it became clear that they do have networks, even if these are generally limited.

Sometimes only family members turned up, sometimes a couple of friends, but there was always someone to invite and the majority of people approached immediately promised to take part. They were also willing to take responsibility for some of the activities included in the plan, although this did depend on the central question of the Conference. If this was of a purely financial nature, then many tasks were delegated to the professionals. Psychological and social support was often a task for the network, and included tasks such as maintaining contacts with friends, family and neighbours, involvement in professional help for the treatment of addictions and stimulating clients to take part in social activities.

Apart from the range of well-defined tasks that the network carried out, the Family Group Conference also helped to create a feeling of solidarity and shared responsibility. A word frequently used in this context is ‘ownership’, which indicates that the plan belongs to the client and his network, not to care workers. A social worker from PuurZuid explained this. “Every once in a while, they get together to look at the plan and talk about how things are going; I can be present for this. This allows them to share the responsibility, which also gives the client a feeling of being supported.”

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Contact between care workers and coordinators was consistently satisfactory. The Conferences, as they were carried out in this pilot project, were new for them. Social workers had had no previous experience with Family Group Conferences, and coordinators only in the context of youth welfare. However, they provided good support for each other, allowing time and scope for mutual learning and for an exchange of information about each other's roles in the process. A social worker from PuurZuid said that "the coordinator really sensed what I needed ... and was able to take my ideas and tips into consideration."

The coordinators also described their contact with clients as being wholly positive, in spite of clients often causing headaches for coordinators by suddenly disappearing during Conference preparations, or by threatening to quit. They were often able to overcome this problem by not giving up on staying in touch, and eventually clients and coordinators learned to trust each other. In these relationships, it became clear that similarities in the cultural and social backgrounds of clients and coordinators could play an important role. A striking example of this was recounted by a coordinator. A client's first question was "Are you blonde?" When she

answered "No, I am black; I have curly hair and I am also fat," the client began to laugh, spoke to the coordinator in their common language and immediately asked when they could meet. Social workers from PuurZuid and Dynamo were very committed to their work. Conferences generally took place in the evenings or at the weekend, outside of office hours.

Except for questions about their time being compensated, they agreed to this arrangement with no hesitation.

We wondered what care workers and coordinators thought about holding Family Group Conferences for Eropaf clients. Their opinion was unanimous: it was a good idea! Isolated individuals and families need people around them to help them overcome problems, and especially in times of crisis – such as when eviction seems imminent – the support of family, friends and neighbours is invaluable. Another advantage of holding Family Group Conferences for clients with complex problems is that a range of issues can be tackled in the course of a single evening. Everyone is gathered together; decisions can be made on the spot and recorded in an action plan.

3.5.2 Learning opportunities and dilemmas

What aspects of Family Group Conferences turned out to be difficult, and what were the most important learning opportunities? The first and most important remark here is that it is important to hold on to the main principal of the Family Group Conference: that its aim is to enhance the strength of a client's informal social network. This may seem obvious, but in practice that is not always the case. Especially in crisis situations such as threatened eviction, the crisis itself tends to become the focus of attention rather than the reasons that the crisis developed in the first place, and the role that a client's social network could play in preventing future crisis situations.

Thinking back to the experience of Ms Haan, in Chapter 1, one would expect the central question of a Family Group Conference to be how she could remain in her home. The

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answer would probably be along the lines of discussing a realistic payment scheme with the housing corporation, getting in touch with the municipal bank for a debt repayment schedule, collecting paperwork for social services and requesting a loan, meeting whatever criteria have been set by the debt relief agency, arranging receivership and so on. Experience has shown that most people tend to back off as a result of just hearing all of this. It is not surprising, then, that Eropaf clients' friends and family members also found it overwhelming. However, they remained concerned about eviction, and wanted to contribute to its avoidance. A coordinator described a Family Group Conference held for an Eropaf client in which only income and debt repayment were discussed; all other issues were ignored during the private phase of the Conference. The social worker involved in the case said, "I emphasized that they needed to address psychological and social issues, and they said that they would, but I got the idea that they were focussing too much on practical issues. As a result, nearly every action point in the Family Group Conference plan was delegated to the social worker and are aimed at preventing eviction. So what is the added value here?"

Two things come to mind: first, that it is useful to bring together the most important people in a client's life so that he can see that he is not alone, but that there are people around him ready to think along and to help out. During a Conference, people in the social network also find out who else is important in the client's life, and know who they can talk to should they have concerns about how things are going. One care worker said about added value: "Responsibility is more shared, and I think that clients feel supported when they know that other people are involved."

Another remark is that focussing on formalized, complicated solutions during the Family Group Conference makes the Conference less effective in preventing threatened eviction than it could be. However, the Family Group Conference

comes into its own when it is not the immediate crisis but the underlying causes of the crisis that are in focus. A better central question would therefore be how Ms Haan's network can support her in solving her financial problems and breaking through her isolation. In this way, they pay more attention to her social and emotional problems, which are at the root of her inability to deal with her financial responsibilities. This seems clearly the perspective of Vroeg-Eropaf, in which a crisis is not yet so acute, leaving more scope for posing questions like these during a Family Group Conference.

However, the unavoidable central question in Eropaf is always how to deal with threatened eviction. This is not a crisis that can be solved during a Family Group Conference, but a thorny issue that will require a different approach for each client.

Having a housing consultant present at a Family Group Conference means that someone is able to clarify the demands and conditions of the housing corporation, and also allows the housing corporation insight into the client's situation. As a social worker from PuurZuid put it, "it is very



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useful for the housing corporation to find out that a client has other problems as well, and to be assured that these problems are being addressed.” Once the social worker has explained, briefly but clearly, what she plans to do to prevent eviction (the Eropaf procedure), it is no longer necessary for the network to spend time and energy discussing that. Instead, they can talk about what they can do to support the client both immediately and in the long term, and what they expect the client to do himself. Since the aim of the Family Group Conference is to strengthen the client’s network, social workers, coordinators and researchers all agree that that should be the focus during the Conference.

One thing that could dissuade care workers from initiating a Family Group Conference is the idea that it will take up a lot of time. This is sometimes the case, since the social worker spends quite a bit of time in consultation with the coordinator and network members during the preparatory phase and sometimes also has to pass on information from other organizations. Gathering information from other disciplines does take time. Still, care workers stated often that the Family Group Conference has actually saved them time.

When asked how much time she spent, one social worker commented, “not more than in a normal procedure – less, in fact, since I was able to delegate the work so quickly.” After registering the client with the Eigen Kracht Centrale, no further action was required until the time of the Conference. All further contact with the client took place through the coordinator, and representatives from other organizations were willing to provide additional information during the first phase of the Conference.

Unfortunately, though, outside care organizations could not always be relied on to participate. Those who did included mental health organization Psi-Q, a housing corporation and, occasionally, the Amsterdam Office for Juvenile Care (BJAA); still, the BJAA and some housing corporations sometimes refused to cooperate, as did the municipal health authority in one case. For the rest, participation varied. It would be helpful if these organizations’ managements were at least aware of the existence of the Family Group Conference model, as familiarity might make them more willing to cooperate.

Some other issues also came to light during the pilot project which deserve further attention. One was that it is important that a social worker be present during the last phase of the Family Group Conference, when the network presents the plan it has developed, so that she can evaluate the plan from the perspective of her professional expertise and experience and judge how practical and feasible it is. Without this check, there is a risk that the plan will be a repeat of the unsuccessful steps already taken, or that information provided to the client and his network during the preliminary phase has not come across clearly.

Another point to keep in mind is the fact that Eropaf clients with debt problems often present behaviour that is characterized by shame and avoidance; it is important that these clients have plenty of personal contact with the coordi-

Family Group Conference for threatened eviction

nator, who can help reduce the chances of the client's dropping out at the last minute by working to win his trust. Still another consideration is how to make sure that professionals clearly understand the Family Group Conference model, and are capable of working with the methodology. It is important that they are aware of the different role that is expected of them, and that they have time to get used to the idea, to realize what using the client's network involves, and to find out how enthusiastic other care workers are who have already worked with the model. "It takes time for people to get used to it, and for them to see that others are enthusiastic," said one care worker.

Finally, it is important not to underestimate the importance of follow-up by the care worker involved. After a Family Group Conference has taken place, there is a risk that the plan will stagnate should someone from the network or from a professional organization fail to carry out a crucial step. Although care workers need not be explicitly involved in the plan, it is important that someone checks in after a while to see how it is progressing. At the very least, one of the members of the network should be appointed as a spokesperson to keep the care worker up to date. This may seem



contradictory to the principles of the Family Group Conference, since the plan belongs to the client and his network. However, it can help to ensure that the plan will be successful.

3.6 During a crisis or afterwards?

This leaves the question of why the Family Group Conference should be organized during a crisis instead of afterwards, when the client and his network are no longer facing imminent eviction. Wouldn't that be a more logical moment for it? However, it often takes a crisis to convince a client of the importance of holding a Family Group Conference. Eropaf clients often prefer to keep their problems hidden, but if a Family Group Conference can help prevent eviction, they will not object to revealing them. This is a reason to plan a Conference during the crisis period, when a client feels there is no alternative other than to participate. On the other hand, in a situation of crisis, participants may tend to focus on financial problems which they are actually powerless to remedy. For this reason it would appear that strengthening the network, which is the real purpose of the Conference, is not really successful. However, once the crisis has passed, the urgency of clients' positions is ameliorated and they feel less motivated to participate. So what is the right timing? To answer this question, a balance must be found in which there is sufficient pressure caused by a crisis situation but also enough time to examine the underlying reasons for the problems at hand. Housing corporations can assist in finding this balance by putting a temporary stop to the eviction process once a Family Group Conference has been organized. Care workers need to determine what they should do during the preparatory phase of the Family Group Conference to avoid eliminating too much of the pressing need for the Conference. A social worker from PuurZuid remarked on this by wondering, "Yes, it is hard to know: what should you do, and what not?" This is a question that must be addressed over and over, as the situation is different for each client.

Family Group Conference for threatened eviction



3.7 Conclusion

It is important to take a number of issues into consideration when using Family Group Conferences with Eropaf clients. First of all, care workers must genuinely understand the importance of bringing in the client's network in order to justify this step to themselves and to the client. The client must also understand how important the network is so that he can participate fully and support whatever plan is set out.

Another point to remember is that clients often avoid exposing the full extent of their problems until some extrinsic motivation, such as imminent eviction, forces them to do so. It is also important to remember that it takes time to organize a Family Group Conference and to assemble enough people from the client's network; for this reason, housing corporations should allow ample time when dealing with Eropaf clients. However, the most essential criteria for success is that the Conference focuses on the social network's greatest contributions: moral and emotional support for the client.

14. We consider a Conference to be started once a client has given his permission to be registered with the Eigen Kracht Centrale and been assigned a coordinator.
15. A monthly meeting for various representatives from RAAK projects, the project leader, researchers and the research and methodology lector.



4 Research and professional methodology

This chapter addresses three questions:

1. What is the role of research at the level of higher professional education, and how can it enhance the quality of professionals' work?
2. What criteria must be met in order for institutes for higher professional education to function as solid research partners in these processes?
3. What has this research contributed to theories of outreach work?

4.1 What is the role of research in higher professional education in relation to raising professional standards?

This research illustrates opportunities for institutes for higher professional education which have arisen as a result of new legislation on higher education in which research becomes the second core focus of higher professional education. This legislation came about in response to the EU's adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, when consensus was reached that it was essential to develop a knowledge-based economy in order to safeguard Europe's wealth and economic power throughout the twenty-first century. The Dutch government subsequently formulated its ambition that, by the year 2010, half of the Netherlands' working population should consist of independent thinking, innovative and creative graduates of higher education programmes. However, this would only be possible with a solid contribution by the institutes for higher professional education, not only universities. Since then, a number of ideas have been implemented to stimulate research at these institutes, including special lecturers and subsidies for regional programmes for the dissemination of knowledge (RAAK). At present, institutes for professional higher education still receive only a tiny percentage of the amount allotted to universities: 70 million Euros, as opposed

to the 2 billion available to universities (figures for 2007). Even so, they will very soon transform themselves from 'educational factories' to centres for professional innovation, no longer providing their students with 'second-hand knowledge' (as it has been referred to by Professor Joseph Kessels), but educating the professionals of the future. For this reason, it is essential that the knowledge used in educational programmes closely follow innovations in the field. The terms of the RAAK programmes also emphasize the responsibility of the institutes for higher professional education as partners for professionals in innovative regional practice.

Social work is a field in which much innovative work remains to be done. At present, there is still need for a solid knowledge base for professional practice. This is one of the reasons that professions working in the field have been forced into a defensive position in recent years, a trend that has been reinforced by a string of dramatic cases involving children, widely reported in the media with the suggestion of failure on the part of the responsible organizations. People in the field are not accustomed to the implementation of research findings in their daily work, in part because much of the research carried out in the social sciences focuses on policy rather than practice. An example of this is research carried out in May 2008 on behalf of the Amsterdam auditing office. The central questions in that study addressed the efficiency and effectiveness of city districts in directing youth work projects, whether or not the desired results were being achieved by the organizations involved and what success factors were responsible for the organizations' being able to provide an appropriate range of care.

Results from this type of research do not address the gaps in social workers' practical apparatus, the tools they can use daily as they seek out new perspectives for young people. In

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fact, they are often put to the service of some ulterior political agenda, frequently one in which the message is hardly positive for the social workers themselves (“youth work doesn’t work”). Another problem is that, although social work is represented in the institutes for professional higher education, there is no real equivalent for it at university level, as there are for other professions such as law, psychology and economy. The academic areas which most closely resembled any kind of applied social work were dropped in the nineteen-eighties. Therefore, the onus is on the institutes for professional education to make a large contribution to the enhancement of social workers’ professionalism. In this, RAAK orients its activities towards demand-driven practical knowledge acquired from research into innovative practice. Finding and developing knowledge for professionals in the field is complex, and the research presented in this publication is a good example of that. However, it has produced not only practical knowledge for social workers, but also knowledge of the criteria for success in innovative processes. Similar research in an institute for higher professional education can add a third kind of knowledge, which is an understanding of the kinds of new knowledge that can be expected to emerge from research at that level. This chapter deals with all of these developments in the generation of new knowledge.

4.1.1 Research into innovation: a complex process

Institutes for higher professional education always maintain stronger ties to the field, including professionals and organizations, than do most university faculties. If such an institute could even be considered as an ivory tower, then it is one separated from the rest of the world by nothing more than a notional moat spanned by many bridges. Interns and graduates move out into the field, later providing guidance for other students and sometimes returning to the institute as guest lecturers or tutors. This is a family-like relationship



that is conducive to research. Professionals feel reassured when their questions are addressed by researchers who are at home in their field, and this can help them overcome their general scepticism regarding research. They also have interests at stake with regard to the knowledge generated by research within the institution, which will allow their future colleagues to be educated to the highest possible standards.

A good example of this is the introduction of outreach work in the social work faculty of the Hogeschool van Amsterdam. In 2005, fourth-year students reported the results of research commissioned by the Dutch Association for Social Work, and presented their work during a meeting of teaching staff from the social work department. These teachers were even more impressed by the students’ enthusiasm than by the quality of their arguments; after all, it would take another two years before the idea of outreach took firm hold in the programme. Before that was the case, however, a conflict had to be resolved. When the Foundation for Development and Support of Social Work (SOM) submitted a research request to the faculty in 2006 asking for students to evaluate the new Eropaf methodology, it did not receive any response. Whenever research requests are submitted by outside parties,

students may choose whether or not to take them up; in the case of the SOM project, none of the fourth-year students seemed interested. Inevitably, this led to hurt feelings. “Does no one think Eropaf is at all important?” asked the head of SOM. “We do,” responded the faculty, “but the students have voted with their feet.” The SOM was incensed, feeling that the faculty should take responsibility for the choice of research being carried out. This is a valid point, but since outreach work had never been part of the programme, how could students be expected to show interest into it of their own accord? However, later in 2006, the Eropaf! Foundation and the HvA were able to reach an amicable agreement when the De Karthuizer centre, the research and training centre for the Social Work and Law department of the Hogeschool van Amsterdam, set up a programme in Prevention and Outreach Work. The Dutch Association for Social Work (NVMW) ensured that outreach work was a prominent feature of the social worker’s professional profile, while SOM and the De Karthuizer centre together came up with a programme for supplementary training in outreach work.

All of this serves as an illustration that innovation does not drive itself, but that outside stimulus is often required to set it in motion in the public sector, whether the setting is educational or professional. Eropaf is another example: people working in social programmes run by the Salvation Army and HVO Querido (a help organization for the homeless) felt that social work was failing in other areas, which was leading to ever larger numbers of homeless people. They discovered that eviction was often preventable, and they showed how to do it: this was the birth of the Flying Dutchman project. But a single group working with innovative techniques was not enough to effect a change in the established order of care work. Instead, this requires orders from above, campaigns and conferences, political lobbying, expense accounts, safety nets and protocols. In short, a myriad of bureaucratic procedures and formalities are needed, not to mention all the

other sensitive issues that require a delicate touch: courage, the ability to keep things in perspective, and an antipathy for solipsism.

This is part of what makes research problematic in institutions for higher professional education: it is dissatisfaction with the results of current practice that inspires innovation, often in response to request from the field. Besides broad support and agreement that change is indeed necessary, innovation also requires additional competence on the part of professionals and management. This means that research is being carried out in circumstances in which established practice and routines are subject to change. At the same time, what is new is also unknown; although the framework has been set out, unexpected complications can still arise. One of these complications is that the professionals involved will discover, in the course of using a new approach, that they lack some necessary competence. Another is that people have different attitudes toward change: if changes are imposed by management, the people who are affected in their daily work may be resistant to it. Still, even when there is broad support, innovation still comes with a triple effect of extra work. First, staff will begin working with new methodology and tools, some of which may not yet have been perfected. At the same time, they are expected to refine and improve these new tools as they begin working with them, continuously acquiring the accompanying new competence. It is these conditions – often enough characterized by a heavier workload and more uncertainty and pressure – that the researchers in higher professional education must operate.

Things become even more complex as attempts are made to adapt research projects to address the needs of professionals in the field, as is required, for example, by the terms of the RAAK subsidies. What kind of practical needs are expressed by social workers, to be addressed by research? Occasionally, when there is consensus within an institution about what kind of change is necessary in practice, or when change is

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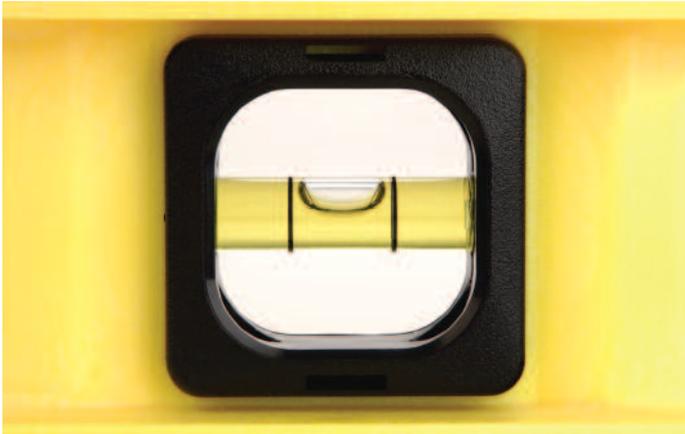
broadly supported, this question is easy to answer. However, differences of opinion tend to emerge quite quickly. The ways people regard problems and acceptable solutions are as diverse as people themselves, with every possible attitude towards human behaviour, change and opportunity represented. The examples presented here show the complexity of the knowledge gathered during this research project: it is not objective but completely subjective; it concentrates not on a single discipline or viewpoint but is based on an integrated approach toward a wide range of problems; perspectives are numerous and wide-ranging.

Demand-driven research is inextricably connected to the needs of the clients served by the professionals working in the field. After all, social workers are expected to help their clients (and people involved with their clients) with their problems. Therefore, research cannot remain limited to the needs of social workers but must address the needs of their clients as well. This means that criteria applied to the quality of knowledge, such as its validity and reliability, must be transposed to the arena of practical use. What works, and under what conditions does it work? What enhances the lifespan of new developments? Clients are not the only group with a



broad range of perspectives (for example, those of parents, or children); the complexity of society implies additional interests: those of politicians, for example, as well as managers and other leaders, social services departments and professionals in the field. Another aspect to keep in mind is the different interests of professional and non-professional parties, the latter including pressure groups, client representative committees and neighbourhood groups.

Geert van der Laan (2007) has stated that the relationship between client and care worker in a health and welfare setting is essentially the same as that between researcher and research subject. Ideally, the care worker's actions are steered by the client, and those of the researcher by the research subject. However, if researcher and care worker perform as they should, the opposite can be equally true. In fact, both are situations of mutual influence. The quality of the relationship determines the quality of research to a large degree. Whenever there is a pre-existing relationship of trust, the quality of results will be appreciably enhanced, as the research will be able to gain access to information to which others may not. At the same time, the researcher can afford to be more critical, since he or she has already been accepted as a trustworthy partner. This kind of mutual influence in a research situation requires methods of gathering information which cannot be conceived and applied from the top down, in the conference rooms and offices of managers. Instead, researchers must enter into the cut and thrust of daily practice in order to see for themselves how relationships between professionals and clients are conducted. This is even more true for interaction with newer client groups, those considered more difficult to help, and those who do not seek out help of their own accord. Two examples of these are Vroegmelding (Early Alarm) and the Family Group Conference, both described in this paper.



4.2 The institute for higher education as acceptable research partner: criteria

In the social sciences, innovation is still often imposed using a top-down approach of planning, action and evaluation, and failing to make use of the innovative creativity and insight of professionals active in the field (referred to in post-Lisbon jargon as 'knowledge workers'). However, consensus in Lisbon was based on innovation from the bottom up, an approach in which research should be part of professionals' development both during their training and in their work in organizations. Leemans and Wardekker (2008) identified three types of research competence which should be developed.

The first is an investigative attitude or, in other words, "not taking the accustomed course of things for granted, focused attentiveness, noticing things ... being critical". In this, they see parallels with attitudinal aspects of the approaches described by Andries Baart.

The second competence concerns investigative awareness: "being aware that research done by others may sometimes help in understanding your own practice and in solving problems you encounter, but may also help you noticing

problems in your own practice. It also implies a positive attitude towards research done by others, and the willingness to participate in such research ... And lastly, ... you can gain a better understanding of the problems and possibilities in your own situation by doing small-scale research yourself."

Finally, there is research competence: "The third component is more than skills in problem formulation, data gathering and analysis. It also (at least in principle) requires the ability, supported by adequate theory, to see and understand your own practice ... in the context of ... the neighbourhood ... and ultimately, of society as a whole."

Research in higher professional education should stimulate the development of this competence. The cases described here illustrate the fact that gathering new knowledge during processes of innovation requires special competence both from the professionals involved and from researchers. This knowledge is less the result of the potential of the individual participants than of the nature and quality of their interaction with each other. The effect is stronger as working conditions become less stable and disruption and unexpected occurrences more frequent, as these circumstances force professionals and researchers to meet new situations head-on, even though the knowledge or skills needed to deal with them may be absent. After all, learning to learn is an important competence in itself. As they wrestle with the problems and pressures of daily practice, it is not only their practice that changes but the participants themselves. Much of this change occurs implicitly.

Theories of knowledge and practical development still tend to approach expertise 'vertically', i.e. by assuming that some people are more knowledgeable than others, and that this can be measured in segments of levels and stages. According to this approach, newly-qualified professionals have a limited and badly-organized knowledge base and apply a one-sided perspective to processes, which limits their problem-solving potential. Experts, on the other hand, have a well-developed

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knowledge base which enables them to implement a range of external and internal solutions. However, empirical studies have shown that these so-called experts are far from consistent in their performance, and that 'young' professionals can in fact sometimes perform better in new or unusual situations. These findings undermine the traditional view of the position of experts. Miedema and Stam (2008) have shown the importance of a horizontal approach to expertise and how it is acquired, and that this becomes even more important in situations in which participants use varying contexts to develop new perspectives on a current situation, and work together to develop new methodology.

In research into innovation, it is also important to investigate how new knowledge, new methodology and new processes and tools are created. The knowledge alliances which have come about as a result of Eropaf innovations can be seen in three different stages: attractiveness, reliability and sustainability. This development implies the formation of a community of practice, a process in which researchers can play an important role.

4.2.1 Attractiveness

Attractiveness is connected with being understood and acknowledged. As we have discussed, education and practice are interconnected in Amsterdam. Academic researchers usually keep a suitable distance from the subjects of their research, while researchers from higher professional education seek closer proximity to their area of research, which is the working environment of the professional working in the field. This is certainly a result of the close relationship between social work faculties and the field. This relationship can be further enhanced through innovation, with both sharing common knowledge requirements. For educators and students, it was important to be at the forefront of new developments in outreach practices during this research project. Gathering knowledge about how and

what professionals learn from innovation was also important, both for education and for the professionals themselves. For social workers, the transition from working to prescribed models to being a creative knowledge worker is still new, as is understanding of the competences that this transition will require. Professionals in the field use research to enlarge their professional repertoire; for institutes for higher professional education it is a useful educational tool. With this shared interest in research, there are regional perspectives for long-lasting relationships which will be profitable for both parties. The school makes it possible for social work organizations to commission labour-intensive research relatively cheaply, carrying out evaluation and design research with the idea that many hands make light work. Various people can be put to work on these projects: undergraduates, graduate students, junior and senior researchers and PhD students, and research students from the institutes for professional higher education.

The research relationship between the De Karthuizer centre and the field is mainly based on innovation, including the projects described here. These are innovations that have come about through boundary crossing, a situation in which



people from different organizations, all working with the same innovative technique, form a knowledge alliance with researchers. The accompanying book illustrates the diversity of the participants, as well as their similarities. Research also addressed questions such as how staff from housing corporations and social work organizations can work together most effectively; how professionals and people from the client's network can work together on equal footing; how can researchers from universities and from institutes for higher professional education can work together within the framework of the De Karthuizer centre's research centre, and how they can become involved in this kind of partnership; how can researchers from these different backgrounds can work together; and how research findings should be published so that the interests and responsibilities of all parties will be addressed. In all of these innovative processes, it was evident that everyone involved - Eigen Kracht Centrale, the De Karthuizer centre and housing corporations – was unprepared for the complexity of boundary crossing.

Simultaneously developing, implementing and improving the tools and practice which emerged from the Vroegmelding and Family Group Conference projects was a process of trial and error in which previously set aims, tools and framework had to be continually crystallized and adjusted. This was an aspect that put the patience and trust of all parties to the test.

4.2.2 Relationships of trust

It took effort to find out how participants in innovation could open their minds to each other's perspectives and approaches. After all, it is only by doing this that they can fully profit from the expertise and questions brought in from the various domains. But it requires trust, integrity and loyalty. Developing a relationship of trust turned out to be a cyclical process of three phases: exploration, adjustment of expectations (based on both positive experiences and disap-

pointments) and reflective communication.

Each cycle led to a joint reformulation of the original aims, methodology and processes. The relationship of trust was transformed into broad support for and ownership of the innovation. To put it differently: in bottom-up innovation, learning and development takes place when the ideas and needs of different cultures clash, acknowledge each other and form new meaning. Finally, participants are able to create a new, common approach. Each of the phases of the cycle was amply experienced during the innovations described in this paper. For example, by conducting home visits together, staff from Dynamo and housing corporation Ymere were able to pinpoint their common interests; staff from PuurZuid and the Eigen Kracht Centrale acquired understanding of the opportunities and limitations of conferences with the social network of clients facing eviction.

Initially, researchers and professionals who carried out innovations used a straightforward, cautious style of communication that became increasingly frank. Research findings, ideas, needs and uncertainties were shared not only by e-mail and telephone, but also in personal meetings between researchers and the teams who were developing and implementing the innovations. In monthly expert meetings, insights were exchanged and problems discussed; communication was direct and characterized by openness and dialogue focussing both on content (shaping innovations) and process (identifying and confirming common interests). In this way, a feeling of trust and familiarity gradually took hold and sensitive issues such as doubt and disappointment could be discussed constructively.

This was a clear contrast to how researchers experienced communication with the SOM and the directors of the social work organizations nine months later. The researchers did attend meetings, but research was seldom on the agenda. Instead, the bimonthly meetings were used to discuss the how the Eropaf approach could be enhanced, and how they

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could do more to provide early notification to power companies and health insurers of clients' debt problems. These steering group meetings were much less an arena for the exchange of knowledge and reflection on current innovation, as it was assumed, rightly, that these were on track. As a result, the research pilot projects disappeared from view somewhat.

Meanwhile, several new Vroegmelding pilots took off across the city in the course of 2007. However, since these were outside the reach of the steering group, the question arose as to who was in charge of Eropaf pilot projects in Amsterdam. It was also unclear how the pilots were generating new knowledge. Each city district, housing corporation and social work organization seemed to be working autonomously. In the autumn of 2007 it finally became painfully obvious that the steering group was not actually driving the project. Two round-table meetings were held during which the city council, city districts, housing corporations and heads of social work organizations agreed on a single, city-wide version of the Vroeg-Eropaf model to deal with rent arrears. The North Amsterdam district's model was chosen as the ideal: each district would take charge of the programmes and ensure that the social work organizations in that district agreed on

how Vroeg-Eropaf would be used in cases of rent arrears. A city-wide workgroup was charged with the preparatory work. Once this was settled, the SOM and the heads of the social work organizations decided that the steering group could be disbanded, which meant that the researchers had lost their link to the management level of the social work organizations. They feared that this would unacceptably reduce the profitability, in terms of new knowledge and learning, of both the pilot projects and their research. At the time, data was still being gathered and it would be quite a while before the final research findings could be presented. Therefore, the researchers decided to present their first impressions during the last meeting of the steering group, along with their preliminary conclusions and recommendations. This was hurried; in fact it was prematurely done. The researchers had hoped to provide support to the social work organizations, who were at that time involved in negotiations on a city-wide approach for Vroeg-Eropaf. However, neither the chair of the heads of the directors of the social work organizations, nor the secretary of the SOM, took this presentation as a gesture of support; both responded negatively. They felt that the conclusions had not been properly founded, and that their research questions were insufficiently addressed. Unhappy with the researchers' decision to present their findings early, they even cast doubt on the validity of the research itself. The researchers, surprised by this response, were faced with the realization that even though they got along well with the social workers themselves, this did not mean that their relationship with their managers would be as good. The relationship of trust which they had developed with the people implementing the innovations did not lead to the approval of the managers: in Amsterdam, winning trust from the bottom up was a completely different process than from the top down, one with a completely different dynamic.



4.2.3 Sustainability

This weak foundation was a threat to the practical value of the knowledge generated by the pilot projects. The first response of the academic researchers in the team was to suggest that such close collaboration with the people implementing the innovations would make research unnecessarily difficult. They felt that the research, and consequently the knowledge generated by this research, was part of the innovation. Wouldn't it be much simpler if researchers did not involve themselves in the processes of innovation, so that they could remain independent instead of being boundary crossers?

Instead of having to deal with professionals from a range of organizations, researchers could limit their contacts to whoever had commissioned their research. This would also mean that they could operate along more traditional lines of research in which neutrality and objectivity are seen as the best way of ensuring valid and reliable results. Good relationships alone are not enough when there is an emphasis on concrete results, as is increasingly the case in the field of social work. In other words, the academic researchers warned that setting up research from the bottom up was risky, as

knowledge gathered in so short a period could eventually prove unreliable if it was not supported by staff working from the top down.

Teaching staff from the institutes for higher professional education, as well as junior researchers, were unwilling to discard the warm, interdependent relationships they had developed with the people involved in innovation: after all, this was a source of lasting results. They felt that this was their advantage over academic research, and clung to the objective of the RAAK projects, which was to discover how research could help to link up with and provide support to the innovative potential of professions working in the field. They now added the extra criterion of not turning managers against them. This dilemma was discussed in expert meetings between researchers from the universities and from institutes of higher professional education, and the conclusion was that both were necessary. 'Warm' research, carried out in close proximity to actual practice, would produce context-dependent knowledge, while 'cold', fundamental research would lead to knowledge that would transcend context and be of use mainly to managers and other leaders. The latter would include knowledge of the long-term effectiveness of Eropaf, for example.

Because social workers' practice has only a minimal scientific basis, the focus should not be solely a mix of warm and cold knowledge (product) but on warm and cold ways of understanding (process). Geert van der Laan (2007) refers to this as embedding research in care and welfare practice. It is not so much methodology as embedding research in practical situations that determines the way in which scientific knowledge filters into daily practice or, in other words, the extent to which daily practice makes active use of this knowledge. Often, interests clash: people in the field 'do not want to know'; it is not convenient for their strategies. In that case, there is no interdependence on the basis of equality but a situation of calculating, strategic behaviour (p. 21). Geert van

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der Laan (2003/4) categorized current forms of knowledge generation in social work as practice-based evidence, knowledge gained through experience as an outcome of reflection on case work. The 'warm' practical research of Vroegmelding and Family Group Conference, in which researchers worked in close collaboration with innovative professionals in the field to develop new knowledge, is an example of this. In projects such as CasusConsult, Van der Laan has worked to set forth this context-dependent method of increasing knowledge. This warm knowledge must be linked to context-independent, cold knowledge so that the professionals' actions can be seen as evidence-based practice.

One example of cold research in the context of RAAK is the *Social Return On Investment* research carried out by Ronald van der Lugt, who examined the relative merits and disappointments of Eropaf. In his research, Van der Lugt showed that although Eropaf and Vroegmelding could lead to substantial financial success, it would be difficult to determine a net result because so many of the precise measurements necessary to obtain a clear result were unavailable for the Amsterdam projects, or were ambiguous or obscured. The research also illuminated aspects which would increase Eropaf's durability but which were as yet not present. Another example of cold research is client file research, which was used to evaluate the effects of intervention six months after it took place. See further Chapter 2.

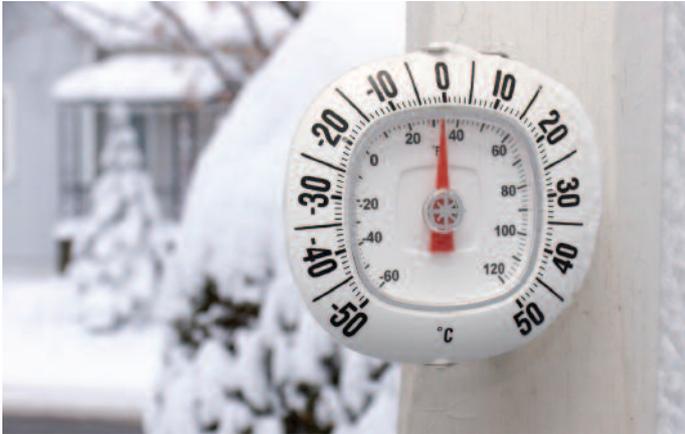
4.2.4 Communities of practice

A combination of practice-based evidence and evidence-based practice is needed in order to provide a scientific basis for social workers' practice. According to Steyaert and Van den Biggelaar (2008), this should be arranged in communities of practice, in which the social work organizations and the working professionals can internalize their professional scepticism and find validation for their reflections. Some researchers, notably Etienne Wenger and Julien Orr, have

argued that this is a vastly more efficient way to collect and disseminate knowledge than traditional processes. A community of practice can take many forms, but central to all is the idea that people must be given the space to reflect on the effects of their word and that they are challenged to use reflection as a tool for developing professional innovation.

In the research in this paper, communities of practice have been formed in which a mix of warm and cold knowledge are processed. In the RAAK research projects, people from a range of organizations and with different types of expertise formed alliances. In one case in the early intervention pilot, housing consultants and debt relief workers from a social work organization carried out interventions together; in another, debt collection staff from several housing corporations consulted with social workers, after which the social workers carried out the interventions. Researchers from the institutes of higher professional education interviewed participants and returned their findings to staff of housing corporations, social work organizations and the SOM. The researchers then presented their reflections for discussion in a leadership conference concerned with research findings regarding early intervention and with perceptions of knowledge methodology. This conference was attended by lecturers and other senior researchers, and representatives from a social work organization, the Amsterdam Federation of Housing Corporations and members of the Eropaf! Foundation.

In the Family Group Conference pilot project, coordinators from the Eigen Kracht Centrale and social workers from two different organizations worked on developing Family Group Conferences for Eropaf clients; they were also interviewed by researchers from the institute of higher professional education. These results were discussed in a leadership conference consisting of these researchers and senior researchers from Eigen Kracht Centrale, a social worker and a team leader from a social work organization.



Both of these leadership conferences grew into communities of practice in which joint reflection on difficulties and results led to adjustments and enhancement of the innovations. New, effective solutions were found that could never have been developed solely behind the closed doors of an organization. In this way, the Family Group Conference research led to the realization that social workers' ideas of their clients' strengths, opportunities and limitations were often incorrect. However, this realization only emerged with the help of the Eigen Kracht Centrale who, in a way, amplified the voices of the Eropaf clients. This in turn helped social workers to see their clients' problems and solutions from another perspective. The Family Group Conference turned out to be not only a decision-making model for addressing rent arrears, but also a research tool, as it helped social workers to understand their more resistant clients, those with whom they had entered into a relationship because they were facing eviction.

The Family Group Conference leadership conference also concerned itself with questions of strategy. Besides positive results, The Family Group Conference had also led to a number of disappointments. One of these disappointments, in the context of the Social Support Act, was that a feeling arose

among organizations, service departments and government that times were with them, financially. Unreasonable expectations then led to bitter disappointment, in turn leading to the baby (the Family Group Conference) being thrown out with the bathwater.

One clear success of the Family Group Conference for Eropaf clients was that social workers became better able to position themselves among other involved parties such as housing corporations, benefit offices, youth welfare, debt relief workers and bailiffs, all of whom tended to have their own set of demands and to present these as the most pressing in a debt-related crisis. Often, social workers were forced to function as messengers between the other organizations, but the Family Group Conference procedure gave them the freedom to perform as an advocate for their clients' interests. It also helped clarify the responsibilities of the social worker as opposed to those of the network of the client, for example helping to prevent the social worker from imposing his or her own definition of and solutions for a client's problems too rigidly. At the same time, the Family Group Conference aided social workers in their role as advisor to their clients. Often, the client's network was unable to recognize just how severe the problems were which had led to the pattern of behaviour which in turn led to debt crisis. The network therefore tended to have an optimistic outlook on the situation which was in fact unwarranted. The social worker would then have to help the network to recognize the situation for what it really was: to see that moving in with a family member was not a long-term solution, that overcoming addiction requires dedication and patience, that clients with mental health issues would have difficulty keeping on track.

In the leadership conference for early intervention and knowledge methodology, strategic questions arose rapidly. These were related to criteria for reliable warm research, how outside parties should be informed of research findings, the importance of cold knowledge (including profit and loss

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analysis and evaluation of effectiveness), and the competences that social workers and their managers would need in order to develop the best mix of warm experience and cold knowledge. It became painfully obvious that, without the support of management, social workers would not long be able to continue thinking outside of the context their own organizations. So what kind of competence did managers need? What conditions would then need to create so that social workers could evolve, within knowledge alliances, from staff who simply did what was expected of them into knowledge workers? What would enable them to share a problem and, in their attempts to solve it, to transcend the prescribed methodology of their organization? One important condition turned out to be facilitation of learning by staff involved in innovation. This included providing training and coaching, but also allowing staff to delegate responsibilities, to experiment and to make mistakes. It also implies that ideas and plans not be imposed from above, but that discussion is encouraged and people alert to unexpected developments, frictions and conflicts. Finally, it implies stimulating the formation of a new vision and new theory. According to Marko Noordegraaf, managers have an important role to play in this. As he sees it, they should have "important ideas and arguments about what goes on in and around the organizations. This requires them to point out developments and relevant events, and to see what have been called 'strategic details' ... Managers in the public sector will need to develop standards that are not disconnected from the workplace, and to implement them in a way that is not considered as alienating." (Noordegraaf, 2008, 16).

4.3 Thinking theoretically about outreach work

This research has led to insights into the forming of coalitions from the bottom up, getting a foot in each other's door in the housing and welfare sectors and between professionals and the population in general. These insights are not limited

to innovative processes but also include forms of outreach work that are based on compassion and support for the more vulnerable members of society.

Outreach work brings together two paradigms of care and service. The first is how to enter the client's own subjective world, an idea that took hold in care and welfare circles after World War II as a result of insights provided by the social sciences about how social problems and problem behaviour developed. This led to a range of methodologies, all of which centred on showing compassion with the client and motivating him to regain a grip on his own life. It also led to theories of determinism, popular among care workers and social workers before the war, being discarded and replaced with an acknowledgement of the complexities of human personality and social interaction. Interview skills were expected to help care workers connect with their clients and understand how they lived and experienced the world. Knowledge of psychology, sociology, philosophy and pedagogy were to help the care worker in formulating questions with which to support clients in their quest to recognize and address their problems. As Jan Floris de Jong wrote in 1950, "The client's right of self-determination is the alpha and omega of the social worker's thoughts and actions."¹⁶

On the other hand is the problem of how to enter a client's subjective world, which was the central paradigm for welfare workers and others working in poverty relief, child protection and housing in the period before the World War II. Often, this involved distrust, coercion and supervision. In the 1910s, one social worker, Marie Muller-Lulofs,¹⁷ warned that, upon visiting a family for the first time, social workers should not approach them with distrust or barge into the home in an arrogant manner, nor should they open cupboards without permission nor peer into pots and pans. Apparently this was allowed during subsequent visits. Looking back over the first half of the twentieth century, Marie Kamphuis, who brought

social casework from the United States to the Netherlands and first introduced the paradigm of entering clients' subjective worlds, remarked that "People asking for help were treated in a way that was pedantic, insinuating and moralizing."

In the methodologies examined for this research, care workers entered their clients' subjective worlds by knocking on their doors, and during conferences the client's network of family, friends and acquaintances. They did this from a position of compassion, through the use of dialogue and with the intention of enhancing their clients' self-realization. In the outreach methods described here, a synergy exists between the paradigms of the subjective world and the objective world in which clients live. Possibilities and opportunities for care workers to enter into a client's physical and social environment were thus linked with possibilities in his subjective world. This is not surprising, since it has taken place for many years in the context of social work in the form of home visits.

What is new here is that the home visits examined in this research were not conducted at the request of clients, and that conferences were not conducted following the tradi-



tional plan of intake and action plan as determined by the care worker. Cases examined in the course of this research have thus led to knowledge of ways to enter the client's subjective world according to the post-war paradigm.

For the social worker, this expansion of the action radius helps give better picture of the 'whole' client, with important aspects that were previously unacknowledged or insufficiently illuminated now receiving the attention they deserve. This synergy also enables new forms of collaboration and distribution of work both among professionals and between professionals and the general public, in which more respect is shown to clients' self-realizing potential and which enlarges possibilities for demand-driven practice. Although intervention is instigated not at the request of the client but by social workers, clients are generally glad that it took place. Benefit offices and housing corporations, both of which tend to make their policies mandatory for clients, also turned out to be satisfied with their cooperation with social workers and other care workers. Because their approach was solution-oriented and urging rather than demanding, new opportunities emerged. A necessary condition for this kind of synergy is that care workers can take the initiative in

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exploring new possibilities for contact, and new solutions, and that they can remain in charge of developments. In the main, social work and other care as well as the interventions of other organizations are intended as temporary stopgaps. As Hans Achterhuis has stated, care workers should work towards eliminating the need for their own presence. This was the main idea of both innovations examined here: that a 'neutral' situation such as rent arrears could be used to signal other problems at a very early stage. Because they have a frontline perspective, outreach workers are able to pinpoint who needs specialized help from other care providers, and they are able to guarantee a link to that care, since their own social work organizations offer it.

Solutions offered from the post-war paradigm of compassion, dialogue and self-realization are more likely to be long lasting, as long as care workers are free to deal with cases as they see fit. This freedom does demand a different management style than the currently popular policy-based approach. In the projects examined for this research, a mix of drivers both from the bottom up and from the top down, together with a combination of warm and cold knowledge, presented promising signs for the sharing of responsibilities



among different sectors. As subsequent research into early interventions in the Transvaal neighbourhood showed, these responsibilities transcend the short-term. A mix like this helps professionals to discover what is effective; it also assists them to tailor solutions to people's personal situations and to overcome problems they encounter along the way. In this way, their professional expertise becomes evident to the organizations they deal with and to the general public. This, in turn, leads to recognition which enhances their professional pride individually as well as reinforcing general public opinion regarding social work. These effects allow care workers, in their dealings with clients, to clarify the usefulness and importance of the expertise that has been developed from the perspective of the post-war paradigm. They are able to make clear that clients are not obliged but instead urged to make contact, and that they will not act in a pedantic, insinuating or moralizing way, but instead enter into a dialogue to explore their clients' needs and options, thereby coming to a range of solutions.

Seeking out contact in clients' homes can also lead to questionable practices, for example when people are put under pressure to cooperate. There is a world of difference between easing one's way in and bursting in violently. According to former Dutch MP Ella Vogelaar, bursting in should become more the rule than the exception. As she puts it, "There are an increasing number of ways to get inside people's homes. But the problem is the moral position of care workers, who are hesitant to go in and to stay in. They are afraid to use force, thinking or believing that that is not allowed. This is still the golden rule for care workers ... the way we have organized care and care work is no longer appropriate for the problems we are dealing with today. That is one of the most important things I learned in my visits to the city districts. And this is a fundamental problem: we are assuming that people are able to look after themselves to a certain degree, but they simply cannot." (*De Volkskrant*, 23 October 2008, p. 3).

It would be a pity to return to the pre-war paradigm as a response to a group that, as Ella Vogelaar sees it, may be growing smaller but is causing problems that are ever more serious. The sense of urgency that she describes seems to encourage rather drastic conclusions. After all, the professionals in these projects were not at all hesitant to get into clients' homes, although once inside, they did not intend to enforce intervention at all costs, but rather work together with tenants to avoid their being evicted. The urgent threat of possible eviction was usually enough to convince tenants to seek help for other problems as well, especially those related to addiction, employment and income.

The conclusion reached in the course of this research is that, when care workers form alliances with organizations who traditionally take a more forceful approach to clients' problems, such as benefit offices and housing corporations, they are able to convince them of the advantages of taking a more 'urgent' approach. Solutions arise from the connection of the two paradigms with an attitude of compassion for the client and support for his self-realization. Nowhere in these studies was it evident that social workers needed to forego these principles in favour of the pre-war paradigm, even when dealing with clients for whom the ideal of self-realization



seemed (temporarily, at least) unattainable. In these cases, working from the client's own potential is the most obvious approach. The cases in this research did not include examples of serious disturbance which led to further social problems subsequent to an intervention with outreach work. This confirms that the former minister's forceful approach should not in fact become the rule but must remain the exception. Force offers no solace for the long term; solutions based on urgently encouraged support from tenants do.

16. *Tijdschrift voor Maatschappelijk Werk* (issue 4, page 1).

17. Marie Muller-Lulofs (1854-1954) was the director of the Amsterdam School for Social Work.



5 Lessons learned

Subsequent to the introduction of Eropaf by social work organizations in 2004, there is still a major gap between the small group of formal leaders (including managers, steering group and the SOM) who set out its framework, and the professions who carry it out within the framework but who took up a variety of positions as this innovation was being designed. The latter include leaders, followers and outsiders. Over the past four years, the emphasis within social work organizations has been more on application and less on development of innovation, which was left to the Urban Advice Group of the Eropaf! Foundation. This group consisted of representatives of social work organizations led by a SOM staff member, and came together to discuss problems and to refine aspects of the framework such as the eviction safety net and registration and expense report systems. The Eropaf Urban Steering Group consisted of representatives from the Department for Employment and Income, Dimadi (the collective of directors in social work organizations), the SOM, the Amsterdam Federation of Housing Corporations and the Hogeschool van Amsterdam; this group established a framework for early detection of debt crises, starting with rent arrears and later including arrears for the utilities provider. In November 2007, Amsterdam local government, housing corporations and social work organizations decided to form a city-wide workgroup to prepare a system of early signalling for rent arrears which would cover all city districts. Together with SOM and the housing corporations, the workgroup designed a model in which each city district would enter into an agreement with housing corporations and the organization for social work in that district. Each party took it upon itself to contribute: housing corporations would report each case in which rent arrears amounted to thirty-two days to a central registration desk run by the SOM. The social work organization in that district would have four weeks to investigate the case and, if necessary, to

intervene with help aimed at preventing eviction. After experiences in 2006 and 2007 with bottom up approaches, carried out in the city centre and Oost/Watergraafsmeer districts, a top down framework for early signalling was developed; it is expected that this will be put into use throughout the city as from 1 January 2009. The Vroegmelding (Early Intervention) project will be monitored by each city district separately as well as the central municipal authorities.

A bottom up strategy was applied in the Family Group Conference and Vroeg-Eropaf cases in this research. In addition to advantages, a number of risks also emerged. For example, one year later there was still no indication that the Family Group Conference had attained a permanent position in social work in Amsterdam. Also, lessons learned in the Vroeg-Eropaf pilots were not always received positively by the working group charged with implementing the development across the city from the top down.

It appears that the model in which housing corporations hand on their clients to social workers will become the norm. In this model, housing corporations select specific tenants and pass on their names to social work organizations. These in turn send one or two care workers from different disciplines, such as debt relief and social work, on a home visit. The care workers report back to the housing corporation to discuss how each will adapt its intervention to complement the other. This, however, was the model that emerged as least successful in the pilots we examined; the model that proved most effective was one in which all tenants with rent arrears of two months were listed. Social workers and staff from the housing corporation then examined the list together and decided which clients should receive a home visit, after which a social worker and a housing consultant visited the client.

Lessons learned

Referrals were sent to the SOM, who was able to reclaim expenses from the Department for Employment and Income. Although the links in the decision-making process connected with Vroeg-Eropaf throughout the city were weak, the pilots we examined still showed important results. In both Family Group Conference and Vroegmelding cases, we saw that, as cooperation and reflective communication increased, the roles of leaders and followers began to converge. In other words, social workers' tendency to carry out Vroegmelding and Family Group Conference methodology on their own, or to drift along on the automatic pilot of prescribed methodology and regulations, was prevented by the formation of a community of practice. Everyone involved was able to work actively and systematically to transform their differences of opinion, their doubts and their personal expertise into joint experimentation and solutions. Additionally, in line with findings from other research (Miedema and Stam, 2008), a number of conditions were identified which enable successful bottom up innovation. These innovations:

- employ principles of inclusion, encouraging the participation of as many organizations and staff members as possible;
- safeguard and stimulate good relationships between parties;
- recognize the usefulness of a range of expert perspectives and stimulates respect for these perspectives;
- recognize the necessity of giving and receiving feedback and of linking cold knowledge to warm innovation processes;
- allow mistakes to be made, experimentation to take place and emotions to be expressed;
- organize forms of communication which enable continuous dialogue and discussion of problems and solutions;
- take into account the existence and effects of both formal and unwritten rules;
- celebrate success and support feelings of pride, ownership and self-confidence.

Celebrations of success took on various forms, one of which was Eropaf's contribution to a conference on social work held in Parma, Italy in March 2007. Another was a mini-conference on 17 January 2008 during which staff from housing corporations and social work organizations experienced each other's roles. Besides these events, Eropaf workshops were held during the lectors' conference in May 2008 entitled 'Being There'. Finally, directors, managers, researchers and professionals involved in outreach work with difficult groups held an expert meeting in June 2008. Together with organizations, service bureaus, universities and research centres both in and outside of Amsterdam, the De Karthuizer centre took the initiative in setting up a research consortium which will address research questions connected with assumptions, principles and dilemmas involved in approaching people who need outreach care. A range of research topics have been identified:

- Assumptions about the effectiveness of an outreach approach: Will this approach lead to long-term solutions? To what extent does outreach work see mental disability or partial illiteracy as an underlying cause for problems?
- Principles linked to ethical aspects of interventionary care: identifying troublesome aspects of modern paternalism, or professional actions in providing help to people who have not requested it?
- Dilemmas on the line separating coercion and suggestion, between enforcement and support and between a medical and social-scientific approach of these groups. What lessons can be learned from working in clients' own homes that will lead to a more integrated approach for clients at risk?

The insights and knowledge that have emerged in the course of this RAAK research will provide material that social work faculties can expand upon in the future.

Moves to encourage the gathering of knowledge from the bottom up were particularly encouraging, although in the setting of Amsterdam they also proved highly vulnerable. The



plethora of pilots and projects in Amsterdam's social sector clearly give reason to doubt the municipality's ability to organize its learning. However, a positive note for the city is that this research seems to confirm the assumption of Lisbon 2000, which was that there is a great potential of innovative strength in the professions which is only waiting to be taken up. The Vroegmelding and Family Group Conference case studies show wonderful examples of innovation taking place from the bottom up. Spin offs of innovation strategies do not consist solely of concrete, measurable results, such as clarification of methodologies, agreements of work processes and interaction between the organizations from which professional network alliances have taken shape. On the contrary: they include results that, though perhaps less tangible, were certainly equally important. One finding was that a bottom up approach has a positive effect on self-realization, professional pride, the ability to shoulder responsibility and an entrepreneurial attitude in staff. Another effect is that the findings of this research will be transposed and used in the education of social workers. Starting in the academic year 2008-2009, twenty-four students from three social sciences faculties of the Hogeschool van Amsterdam have taken part in a Minor programme for outreach work. In this programme, attention

has been paid to important findings such as theories, training, work processes and methodology, but also to the participants and the knowledge alliances connected to the Vroegmelding and Family Group Conference projects.

Students in the Master's degree programme of social work, which was launched in Amsterdam in 2008, will be conducting research subsequent to this RAAK project. This research will focus mainly on two questions: first, how can managers and directors in the social sector find the best balance of bottom up and top down research, and between warm and cold knowledge? And second, how can they stimulate boundary crossing with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of outreach work? This will nearly always involve exploring the perspectives of clients who are not able to help themselves, who are often neither motivated nor integrated, and who lack the ingenuity or articulacy to obtain the help they need from mainstream care providers. In the education of outreach social workers, it is important that Master students and those following Minor programmes seek out similar developments that are just as rich in perspective. These could be projects such as those in cities across the Netherlands, but also projects abroad, such as in Antwerp and Birmingham. The resulting network between institutes of higher professional education, universities and research centres has already lead to the hope that these forms of outreach work will become firmly established for the long term.

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