

# Final report on the local project of the Rotterdam STEPS triologue

## August 04

### OVERVIEW

The three partners in the STEPS project (PameijerKeerkring (charity/service provider), INHOLLAND university and OMIJ Rijnmond (social firm) have worked more closely together *because of STEPS* than they would have done otherwise.

The formal project structure impelled the exchange of information and the coordination of actions. It is due to this formal structure that the three partners came together but it is the shared value system that made the cooperation an actual step to further improvement.

Local government has, as stated earlier, no significant role in the support of the disabled in the Netherlands at present and has therefore not been a full member of the local triologue. The municipality was in many ways connected with either the project or with one or more partners participating in the local STEPS project. Especially OMIJ has a long standing relationship with the local authorities.

Since *meaningful Day Activities* were the core business of the partnership, the title of the local project was: ***Work as tool of integration and emancipation.***

Co-ordinator of the project on behalf of the three partners in Rotterdam was L.P.B. (Bart) Branderhorst (Ph.D.)

PameijerKeerkring was officially represented by Peter van der Hoeven and Els van Kooten. On behalf of the INHOLLAND university Peter Peeters and Chantal Aarts participate. OMIJ Rijnmond is represented by Arianne van Geel (vice president).

In the working group Methodology other OMIJ Rijnmond employees participated (Jos Dirks and Aarti Ramal-Bhoelai) and from PameijerKeerkring Peter van Loon. The committee was chaired by Chantal Aarts (from INHOLLAND University). Unfortunately she changed position in March 2004. Fortunately the work was by then as good as finished.

Main activity of the local partnership was the development of the Handbook 'Bart'. The Handbook offers a tool to work with persons with an intellectual disability to colleagues and supervisors who are not trained in this field and work in a not care providing environment (i.a.w., in a normal work environment). Peter Peeters took over for INHOLLAND but the main activities (the implementation plan mainly) was coordinated by the other partners.

The co-ordinator of the project ensured maximum communication between the participants and looks after the marketing activities like the distribution of the Handbook.

## **ACTIVITIES: THE HANDBOOK BART**

The working group Methodology addressed in the Handbook the issue of integrating people with intellectual disabilities into a workforce of a social firm, critical factors of success, values and skills of the personnel department (what needs to be developed and what are the skills we have already). OMIJ will start training the staff from November 2004 according to the method written in the STEPS Handbook.

The persons with an intellectual disability come to PameijerKeerkring for their Day activities. Activities are superficial: they serve no real purpose in most cases. OMIJ offers work that is socially relevant. But OMIJ is not a care provider and has no staff trained to work with intellectually disabled. Thanks to the cooperation of the two organisations disabled (PameijerKeerkring) clients are active in 23 OMIJ activities, especially in the workforce keeping the greens (Public gardens as well as private ones). Gardening and forestry (keeping the greens) is one of the 23 OMIJ activities.

The objective to present a Handbook in which unqualified (e.g. people within the OMIJ Rijnmond organisation) can look up problems they face in relation to an intellectual disabled colleague, is achieved. The Handbook is ready and the plan for implementation is ready as well.

Social, intellectual and/or physical issues are addressed in the Handbook.

The Personnel department of OMIJ Rijnmond will look after updating the Handbook.

The day to day practice was (and still is in many places) that persons with an intellectual disability come and work in a certain OMIJ activity (one of the 23) because he/she so wishes. OMIJ is a social firm that has to make ends meet by the work it does, e.g. by the products and services it produces.

There is a tension between supporting the disabled colleague and getting a maximum result in terms of a certain product. It is depending very much on the OMIJ worker on the spot how an intellectually disabled person is supported. Standard and clear procedures, as written in the Handbook, are essential in creating a system of support that does credit to both aspects: the line of production and the support the disabled individual needs.

In this project, we were combining two worlds: the profit sector (OMIJ) and the care sector (PameijerKeerkring). The meta-view in STEPS came from the INHOLLAND university. These meta-observations were of great value but, in the near future, we will also work together with INHOLLAND in a practical way.

The Handbook (partly written by students from INHOLLAND, supervised by senior staff) and mainly used by OMIJ-workers, will be examined and improved with the help of new INHOLLAND students.

The Handbook will become the first, very concrete, step in an ongoing process of quality improvement thanks to an ongoing dialogue. Not some theoretical exercise: the dialogue takes place on the workfloor!

We develop a mutual language: when addressing challenges we do not lose too much time anymore in describing situations and explaining backgrounds. In a number of situations, this already offered benefits for clients (intellectual disabled persons) and workers (OMIJ Rijnmond personnel) but it will also improve the quality of the education of the INHOLLAND students.

## **COOPERATION IN THE ROTTERDAM TRIALOGUE**

The Rotterdam trialogue was not an organic one. People came together basically because they had to within the STEPS framework. Cooperation between a social firm and a care provider was unusual.

Partly due to the news coverage of STEPS the Rotterdam trialogue set an example in the Netherlands and there are now more places where different organisations work together, inspired by us. Cooperation between a social firm and a university was (and is) even more unusual. It is only because of the PameijerKeerkring link that there is a contact between INHOLLAND and OMIJ Rijnmond.

But now that this connection is there one might say that INHOLLAND students benefit tremendously of the possibility to see how life differs from their theoretical concepts. Also OMIJ benefits because the contact with students makes the down-to-earth mentality of most of the workers a little more subtle.

The complexity of the trialogue was a threat to its continuity. This required attention in the beginning of the project but offers richness in social and intellectual opportunities that a further cooperation in a post STEPS period is no longer an issue. We will continue working together.

The involvement of people with learning disabilities in the Rotterdam trialogue has not been impressive. This is partly due to the fact that the cooperation between PameijerKeerkring and OMIJ Rijnmond was a fact long before the STEPS project began. On the level of the individual the care user always was director of his/her own life already.

What activity the individual chooses outside the Care-system (for instance with the social firm OMIJ) or inside a Day Centre (PameijerKeerkring) is up to that individual. The opportunities for choice are much wider in the OMIJ context than in the context of any service provider, but "the choice, also to choose or not, is yours".

On an organisational level the input of service users was very limited indeed (unfortunately this is not exclusively the case with STEPS). One of the things PameijerKeerkring learned from STEPS is that client panels can function quite well when facilitated by the organisation(s). The Hamburg client conference in February 2004 functioned as an eye opener in this respect.

Students from INHOLLAND joined the PameijerKeerkring delegation in Hamburg. The very positive results both the conference itself and the cooperation offered are important for developing a local strategy in this matter.

The STEPS trialogue Rotterdam decided that INHOLLAND students will be involved in a further development of Client Panels as a way of giving service users influence and "a strong voice of their own". The improvement of the involvement of the service users is adapted by the PameijerKeerkring as a Golden Task for the second half of this year.

## **The future of the STEPS trialogue Rotterdam.**

The cooperation between PameijerKeerkring and INHOLLAND will be continued and deepened. The involvement of students will be organised on the workfloor with the Handbook as binding element and on the level of assisting in setting up service users panels.

The first aspect (the Handbook) will deepen the contact between INHOLLAND and OMIJ Rijnmond, the second is more important for PameijerKeerkring and INHOLLAND.

The Rotterdam trialogue will also keep, and further develop, a good working relationship with the STEPS partners in Hamburg. An exchange of personnel and experiences is being set up as a bilateral project.

## **Conclusion**

STEPS has been a project of value to Rotterdam and with tremendous results.

The cooperation itself proved to be valuable and would never have gone this far without the formal EU-Project requirements and some of the issues would not have come up (service users panels, for instance) for some time if it had not been for STEPS.

The international contacts themselves are difficult to overestimate in their effects. The sharing of information and experiences are of tremendous value but also the different definitions of problems and challenges and the different emotions attached to these definitions did more for enlarging (or transforming) one's paradigm than could ever be imagined before.

The Rotterdam trialogue finds itself lucky to have worked with so many outstanding professionals who combined their being expert with being kind and gentle persons at the same time. The combination of intelligent and intelligible within an framework of commitment connected people more than in any other EU project one of us has ever been in before.

If the final report of the Rotterdam trialogue may be used to express our gratitude for having us as partner in STEPS we like to do so: Thank you very much for working with you in STEPS. It was an absolute pleasure to work with you.

On behalf of the Rotterdam STEPS Trialogue,

Bart Branderhorst