

Action plan for professionals

The objective

There is a huge gap between the systematic world of professionals and the world of vulnerable residents. The aim is to bridge the gap by deploying peer to peer supporters.

Definition of the problem

Many organisations work in the field of care, support and welfare of people in vulnerable circumstances. Professional institutions often consider that vulnerable people only come into the picture when problems become too serious. The reason for this is that there is a huge gap between the world of the institutional system and the world of the residents.

These residents often experience a too high threshold when they request for help from care providers. This may be due to unfamiliarity, lack of digital skills, language problems, cultural differences, and distrust and fear of these institutions. The result is that often these people do not receive the care they so desperately need. As a result, problems can get out of hand and, at a later stage, more expensive and more serious assistance is often required.

Professionals do not always succeed in getting behind the front doors of these vulnerable residents. This is because they do not always know who this target group is and how to approach it.

How can we bridge the gap between the professionals and the vulnerable target group?

The method

A. Understanding the target group

Explain who the target group is and how you can gain their trust by connecting with them. Building trust is paramount.

B. Informal support by means of a confidant training

Explain what the purpose of the confidant is to reach the VP

In 2013, De Mussen started the project “Schilderswijk Moeders”: 20 trained contact women from the neighbourhood are committed to improve the living situation of vulnerable families. They have experience, they know the different communities in the neighbourhood and speak the language of the residents. De Schilderswijk Moeders work on a voluntary basis, they receive weekly training and they are guided by professionals. They enjoy great trust in the neighbourhood and have become important role models.

They offer informal support to families in the neighbourhood:

- *A listening ear for local residents who need it*
- *Practical support for families in their requests for help*
- *They act as a bridge to care institutions;*
- *They advise social workers in their approach.*

In recent years, the Schilderswijk Moeders have worked together with various organisations and institutions. The expertise of social workers and the experience of the mothers strengthen the support of local residents.

However, this cooperation was not based on a shared vision and approach and was not formalised.

C. Role of formal and informal organisations

Explain the role of the professional and the role of the confidant. It is important that the tasks are clearly defined so that everyone knows what is expected of them.

The confidant is a volunteer and it is important that this person does not form part of the systemic world so that the VP can be helped optimally.

D. Cooperation with professional organisations

Make clear which professional organisations are involved with the VPs you focus on. Seek cooperation with different organisations.

In order for families in the Schilderswijk to receive the right care at the right time, it is important that informal and formal care providers can find each other more easily and that cooperation agreements are established between them. With this in mind, De Mussen started the first discussions to establish a partnership in 2020. The partnership consists of the following partners:

- *Schilderswijk Moeders*
- *Multiculturele vrouwen Foundation*
- *CJG*
- *WMO of the Municipality of The Hague*
- *De Koning Health Care Centre*
- *Ella Midwifery care*
- *Indigo prevention*
- *MEE ZHN*
- *Parnassia*
- *Sensa Zorg*
- *STEK*
- *Zuster Mina home care*
- *De Mussen Community centre*

The common interest of all parties involved is that the hard-to-reach families in the Schilderswijk are helped in a timely and appropriate manner.

E. Process

In order to come to a cooperative arrangement, you should organise meetings with the various parties and with the confidants. This way, the professionals get to know each other as well as the confidants. In this way, they hear from each other what problems the VPs are dealing with.

- *Familiarisation between the Schilderswijk Moeders and the care institutions*
- *Drawing up a regional image, including an analysis of the most common problems in the Schilderswijk*
- *Formulating a shared vision and ambition in the form of a central message*
- *Establishing partnership agreements with each individual organisation*
- *Signing together the agreements and partnership-forming*

F. Partnership agreements

Make partnership agreements with all parties. Describe what means can be used, such as workshops, meetings, conferences, etc.

All partners showed a strong need to work together more intensively and integrally. These are some of the agreements we have come to with all partners:

- *To meet monthly in a sounding board group. In these meetings, we discuss case histories. We can also share developments in the neighbourhood and seek a joint response*
- *Achieving short lines of communication by appointing permanent contact persons in all organisations who can be contacted directly by the other partners*
- *Contributing to the promotion of mutual expertise by sharing knowledge and experience*
- *Reinforcing each other's services by sharing and/or developing them among each other when new developments are identified in the neighbourhood.*

G. Evaluation

It is important to evaluate with all parties involved whether the cooperation works and whether it should be adjusted.