

Towards victim awareness in probation in the Netherlands

2011: Act on Strengthening the Position of Victims entered into force.

2012: Ministry of Justice: Implementation paper: "to do justice to victims"

2013: Project "To do justice to victims in the stage of execution"

Our challenge as an offender oriented organization was and still is to realize structural attention for the interest and rights of victims of crime in our probation processes and procedures:

- Advisory Reports for the Court
- Supervision of offenders
- Community sentences

In our probation project we focus on: change of culture, to enlarge victim awareness, to improve knowledge of victim rights (why and what) and methodology (how), to build up a network and to adjust our probation procedures where necessary.

2012: We received project funding from the Ministry of Justice.

To introduce the theme (VD) we started with organizing a Kick off conference with probation workers in which we discussed how probation could contribute to the victims rights in our work with offenders.

2013: As a follow up we organized 3 countrywide workshops, as an assessment that we addressed the right issues. This resulted in commitment of our responsibility and task, namely:

"Restoring the situation and preventing recidivism by paying particular attention to the position and rights of the victim in the stage of execution. Therefore the probation worker motivates and addresses the offender's responsibility for his own behavior. The worker supports the offender to compensate for the (non)-material harm he/she has caused to the victim in order to normalize the situation for both parties."

To increase also acceptance/support and awareness at *management level* we organized 3 masterclasses by Restorative Justice Netherlands.

Although we certainly found commitment in the field, we also met a lack of knowledge how to integrate victim awareness in daily practice. Therefore we asked the University of Applied Sciences in Utrecht to develop a methodical guideline for probation workers. The developers therefore started with research on best practices in Europe and held interviews with probation workers (early adapters/individual initiatives). The guideline is to be considered as a supplement to the probation methodology which is used by probation in the Netherlands. It was delivered in 2014.

2014: In 2014 we continued our project with organizing 8 workshops throughout the country, in which we reached about 150 workers (out of about 2500 probation workers nation wide). We presented a 2,5 hour program based on 3 mainlines: information (background of our project, VD), explanation of the methodical guideline and victim aware probation in practice. For this last part we invited a well experienced probation worker (early adapter), who honestly told her colleagues of her own struggle in addressing subjects as consequences of offenders behavior to the victim, conscious, responsibility, feelings of shame and guilt. And how she overcame her uncertainty to address those matters. Also she told about the positive results she accomplishes with her probation clients. Her contribution had great impact on her colleague probation workers.

Afterwards we sent all the participants of the workshops an e-mail to invite them to apply for "ambassadorship victim awareness". We selected 15 ambassadors, whom we gave the assignment

- to organize local experts groups of knowledge on Victims Rights Issues
- To support Probation teams with the implementation and education
- To share information and experiences about how Probation teams achieve progress in victim awareness
- To improve cooperation with relevant local partners

2015: Together with our project team those 15 ambassadors now form a national circle of knowledge.

Just now we are developing an e-learning module for all our probation workers based on the methodical guideline. This e-learning will be released after the summer.

Based on the outcome of 5 pilots we started in 2014 we will work on an agreement for cooperation and sharing information with relevant partners. Also adjust our working procedures when necessary. The subjects the pilots cover are:

- Adolescents
- Domestic violence and electronic monitoring
- Prison and Probation in cases of leave
- Victim Support/Victim in Focus and Probation on sexual offences and offences with heavy violence
- Community sentences

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