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## Welcome!

Welcome to this Operation Pelios Newsletter. The practical execution of the project has now been running for almost a year: the seventh training for the handicapped participants is just starting when you are reading this. Of the 95 occupationally disabled, 20 now are on an internship and 8 have a regular job! In this Newsletter you can read more about Operatie Pelios. For questions or remarks, please contact us or visit our website: ([www.operatiepelios.nl](http://www.operatiepelios.nl)). We hope you enjoy reading this document!

Wim Schuiten,  
project manager

**FREE**  
**TRAINING FOR EM-**  
**PLOYERS?**

Check page 2!

## About Operatie Pelios

Operatie Pelios is a Dutch, partially ESF-financed project aiming to bridge the gap between employers and the occupationally disabled. On the one hand, new methods in training and coaching are used; on the other hand, innovative reintegration strategies are developed.

The project aims at two target groups: the occupationally disabled employees *and* the employers and mentors.

The **occupationally disabled** first get an intensive group training of 30 sessions and are at the same time intensively coached by a personal coach. After the training, the participant and his/her coach search for an internship and eventually, if possible, for a regular job. Every participant follows one of these reintegration strategies:

- In the *Prohef* model, the employer will have less costs for each occupationally disabled employee. The amount of this discount depends on how much the employee really produces in comparison with the average production level in the company. This strategy tries to relieve the employer.

- The Zelfzoekmodel (Self-search model) provides the occupationally disabled employee with a budget, that he or she can use to find or keep a job. One common use is buying extra facilities that are not covered by Rea law, like a vehicle. The expenses are subject to approval by an independent advisor, who applies specific criteria.
- *Rea+*: within the possibilities of the Rea law, participants are coached and mediated towards internship or work. We call this strategy *Rea+*, because the coaching is more intensive than usual and is preceded by the group training.

Employers and mentors of occupationally disabled employees and pupils are also offered training and coaching, in order to stimulate the process of education and/or work. More about this training can be found on page 2.

Within Operatie Pelios, cooperation with national and transnational partners takes place, each partner dedicating their expertise on this subject. This newsletter will also tell you more about these partnerships.

### Transnational cooperation: The X-Train

The X-Train is a transnational partnership of projects in five European countries, meant to interchange experiences, to develop toolkits and to test methods en trainings in other organizational structures and cultures. The 'X' appears by connecting the participant countries on the European map:

- Portugal (CAD)
- Sweden (Diversity Faces)
- The Netherlands (Operatie Pelios)
- Scotland (SWELL)
- Italy (Techne)

The motto of this partnership is: "a united approach to diversity". This is expressed in the following principles:

- Managing diversity is about treating everybody fairly, not the same. Fair treatment means easing burdens while not assuming that everyone's burden is the same.
- Managing diversity means that it is not enough to treat others as you would want to be treated but to treat others as they would want to be treated.
- Managing diversity is to create an organizational culture, systems and practices that allow every individual to maximize their ability to contribute to the organization's goals and to reach their own full potential.

The X-Train organizations meet regularly and organize seminars and workshops. At one meeting in September 2003 in Portugal, two workshop were given: about prejudices and about values (your own as well as others'). In February 2004 Operatie Pelios hosted an X Train seminar; next to networking and discussing the progress of the X Train activities, our guests were enlightened about the Prohef system, and they visited DSW Stadspark ( an organization based "Social Job Creation Act").

### Next stop: Brussels

This April (26-28), the Employment Week takes place in Brussels: a European platform for networking and interchanging information and 'best practices', which aims for those working at the forefront of employment policy and application. Several X-Train partners will show their faces here! Visit our stand (no. 402) or our workshop: 'The X Train – a transnational perspective on equality and lifelong learning' (Monday, april 26, Project Showcase Theatre I)! Or check out the website: [www.x-train.org](http://www.x-train.org)

### Training for employers

One unique aspect of Operatie Pelios is its dual approach: not only employees, but also the employers are being trained and coached.

Since the application of the **Gatekeeper Law**, the employer has greater responsibility for reducing absence due to illness, and the number of employees registering under the WAO scheme (WAO = Occupational Disability Law). This means new tasks for the employer. To better prepare employers for the coaching of their own sick employees and of new, occupationally disabled employees, Operatie Pelios offers training.

The training will handle issues like: the different target groups and handicaps, how to deal with and coach the target groups, how to make a coaching plan, knowledge of relevant laws (Rea, WAO), and how to find your way to relevant other organisations. When an employer intends to offer a participant of Operation Pelios an internship or contract, Operatie Pelios will provide this training and coaching FOR FREE.

### The next FREE training for employers will start soon!

Enrollment is still possible; please contact the Operation Pelios management (Toeleiding naar Arbeid, tel.: 0031 50 3118188).

### Operatie Pelios: word from training participants

Many occupationally disabled participants of Operatie Pelios have experienced that the longer you are out of work, the wider the gap to a regular job grows. "You start to form your own picture of work, which doesn't always match reality. Looking from your own feelings of insecurity, the labour market can seem quite frightening," Marja says. Before she started the training, she checked carefully whether this would suit her: "My main question was: how much pressure is there on this project, and consequently, on me? Will I get the time that I need? I felt quite reluctant towards the project itself on the one hand, and the idea of going back to work on the other hand. But I was willing to explore these hesitations." For Gijs, the training meant taking a step to return to society. "I didn't have much expectations of the training and was quite sceptical about it at first. During the first few sessions, I assumed the same attitude as always: I was dominant, had a big mouth, acted provokingly. After a while, I realised that I was doing nothing with what I was offered in this training, so I asked myself this question: "Do I want to continue the way I always did, or do I want to make progress in a different manner?" I chose the latter, and started to lay back and really listen." The training gave Marja the confirmation that she was strong enough to start this process; she was able to be on time twice a week, to get homework, and to be in a large group of people. "The group was good, there was a lot of interaction: people would address each other on subjects". Gijs: "The trainers provide topics to think about. You always take that with you, but it is your own choice to do something with it or not. The consequences, therefore, are also for you to acknowledge." From the start of the training, participants also have contact with their personal coach with whom they continue their process after that. For Marja, this was a good way to keep coming, and it was very important to be able to express feelings of fear and insecurity ("learn to look beyond them"). The coach also helps her to stay on target. Gijs sees the personal coach as an advantage as well: "You can always fall back on him/her, whether it concerns getting an internship or a personal matter. They help with 'the total picture', for example: when you have problems



*Training in progress*

*"Looking from your own feelings of insecurity, the labour market can seem quite frightening"*

paying your rent, for example." He went on internship fairly soon after the training, as a technical assistant at a service home, and is still working there for 6 months now. He was very tense when he started: "I was afraid that I had to explain why I had been out of work for so long, but that wasn't the case. I got the time to get used to this new daily rhythm and to the rules, like the time you get for a break. And I have been able to slowly increase my working hours. If there would have been more pressure on me, it would never have worked out." In addition, he paid attention to being more open to cooperation and deliberation with colleagues, instead of retracting like he used to do.

After her training, Marja first investigated further what kind of organisation and work would be right for her, and explored her capacities, motivation, learning points, and need for coaching she had concerning an internship. She found out by talking to close friends about her strong and less strong qualities. At this moment, she and her coach are looking for the right internship, and are also checking out the national cooperation partners within Operatie Pelios.

*For privacy reasons, the names of the interviewed were changed.*

## **Operatie Pelios: word from the trainers**

**Tieneke Meijer, Floor Alberts and Jeannette Hensen**

Every occupationally disabled participant of Operatie Pelios starts with the training, which covers topics like: accepting and handling one's disabilities, social & assertiveness training, and exploring capacities and wishes. Quite often, participants show reluctance at the start. Jeannette: "Some people have an attitude like 'why would I do this, I just want to work!' They don't want to investigate these basic subjects." Along the training, new discoveries are nevertheless made. "People are so often told what they cannot do, that they hardly know their possibilities," Tieneke says. "Some are unconsciously chained by their own or others' ideas of obligations, while they find out here what they really want. For example, someone feels like he really has to find a job, but realises here that he also enjoys spending time with his family." Group dynamics are an essential aspect of the training. "The group represents, in fact, a miniature society, in which we can immediately detect the way people react to each other. Mutual frictions, tasks you don't like to do, shyness; all of these things can happen at work. The question remains: "how do you feel about this? In what different ways can you deal with it? This can be practiced during the training." The group also learns to make the difference between observation (facts) and interpretation (subjectivity). This improves the capacity to put others' opinions in perspective and to respect them at the same time.

Important aspects of the Operatie Pelios training are: positive approach, respect & equivalence, and self-responsibility. The emphasis is on capacities instead of disabilities, and from everybody's life stories qualities are also highlighted. Changing behaviour and thinking patterns is a constructive process: the message is 'you don't need them anymore' instead of 'you shouldn't do that' or 'that's wrong'.

The trainers, being experience-based experts, share their own stories with the group, thus positioning themselves as equal to the participants. This triggers stories in the group. Respecting others the way they are, is another returning issue. For example, one learns things more quickly than someone else, or someone doesn't want to talk about a topic; that's fine. Everybody has his/her own process and takes responsibility for it. The training and coaching are means to reach the goal, but the person will have to make the moves and choices him- or herself. "When a participant sticks with his or her reluctance we will not break through it by force, but we will keep trying to provide handles so that he/she can make progress."

It's an intensive training: 30 sessions in all, two sessions every week. There are always two trainers in a group of 15 at maximum. The pace is also quite high: many subjects are dealt with. "I like doing it together with a colleague," Floor says. "It's easy to complement each other, and while one is doing the talking, the other can make observations." A trainer is never a group member's personal coach at the same time. The participant must have the opportunity to talk about the training with his/her coach, and the other way around. Blind spots are prevented. Frequent deliberation between trainers and coaches takes place; when, for example, a participant wants to explore a training subject further, the trainer communicates this to the coach.

## **National cooperation**

Operatie Pelios' development partners all have plenty of expertise in the area of (re)integration of people with occupational disabilities and/or experience with developing policy and finance:

### **Provincie Groningen (applicant)**

tel. 0031 50 316 47 29

[www.provinciegroningen.nl](http://www.provinciegroningen.nl)

Mr. J. Janssens, Ms. J.W.M. Vogels

### **Toeleiding naar Arbeid (project management)**

tel. 0031 50 311 81 88

[www.operatiepelios.nl](http://www.operatiepelios.nl)

Mr. W. Schuiten

### **UWV**

*Passing occupationally handicapped to Operatie Pelios*

[www.uwv.nl](http://www.uwv.nl)

Mr. H. Post

### **Gemeenten Groningen, Leek en Hoogezand-Sappemeer**

*Passing occupationally handicapped to Operatie Pelios*

[www.groningen.nl](http://www.groningen.nl)

[www.leek.nl](http://www.leek.nl)

[www.hoogezand-sappemeer.nl](http://www.hoogezand-sappemeer.nl)

Mrs. M. Helmens (Groningen)

### **Noorderpoortcollege**

*Educational contact point*

[www.noorderpoort.nl](http://www.noorderpoort.nl)

Mrs. I. Jager

### **DSW Stadspark**

*Passes occupationally handicapped to Operatie Pelios*

Mrs. P. van de Veen

### **Rijksuniversiteit Groningen**

*Evaluation and monitoring*

[www.rug.nl](http://www.rug.nl)

Mr. A.C. Glebbeek

### **Regionaal Arbeidsplatform**

*Represents the labour market-related organisations*

[www.rapgroningen.nl](http://www.rapgroningen.nl)

Mr. P. Boekhoudt

### **St. Prohef**

*Advisor on Prohef implementation*

[www.prohef.nl](http://www.prohef.nl)

Mr. P. van Elswijk

### **St. Budget in Vervoering**

*Represents the occupationally disabled target group*

Ms. J. Boerma