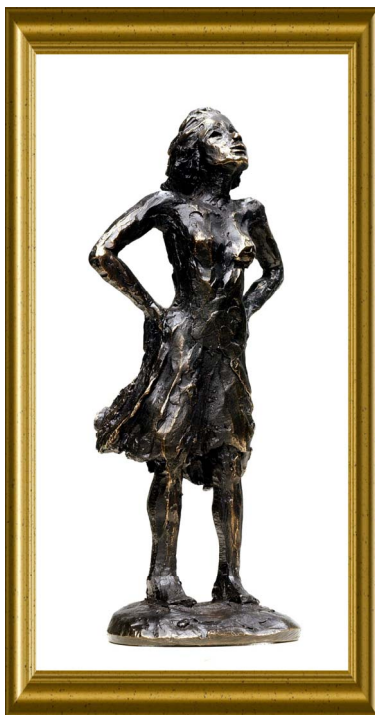


## FEMALE OFFENDERS FOCUSING ON THEIR FUTURE

At any one time, there are approximately 400 women in prisons in the Netherlands who are serving a sentence of over 4 months that has been imposed by a court. There are many issues that have to be addressed if these women are to make a successful return to everyday life, such as psychological problems, debt and their lack of childcare, employment, housing and education. [The Toekomst in Balans, een nieuwe uitdaging](#) (Balancing the Future, a New Challenge) Development Partnership (DP) tackles most of these issues head on and, at the same time, ensures that the women offenders do not disappear down the gaps between the responsibilities of the various agencies involved in the resettlement process.

The activities of Balancing the Future, a New Challenge reflect the European Employment Guidelines which place a strong emphasis on promoting social inclusion and preventing exclusion from the world of work. In its Recommendation ([2004/741/EC](#)) on the implementation of Member States' employment policies, the Council stresses, in its specific recommendations to the Netherlands, the need to: *“reinforce the preventative approach for adults; increase effectiveness of, and access to, active measures for social benefit recipients and those with the greatest risk of inactivity; facilitate the integration of immigrants.”*



*The emblem of one of the prisons - a woman facing a gale of problems*

*“Toekomst in Balans is a broad project that has meant much for the re-integration of women and, along with the collaboration between the prison service and the chain partners, this project has become very important”* said Mr. C.A.P. Vermeulen, the Deputy Sector Governor of the Dutch Prison Service, at a European conference, in March 2004. He went on to add that *“the concept of mainstreaming is an important point for consideration in the model of collaboration with the inside and outside partners and this project is a good example of mainstreaming and dissemination.”* While the DP is managed by the Ministry of Justice through its female prisons and a project agency, there are a number of outside bodies or “chain partners” that enable a holistic approach to be applied to the needs of women prisoners.

### CREATING THE LINKS IN THE CHAIN

The work of the EQUAL round 1 [Balancing the Future DP](#) and its successor, Balancing the Future, a New Challenge has created a comprehensive model for the resettlement of women prisoners which has the potential to be mainstreamed

throughout the Netherlands. In creating this model, there were a number of potential difficulties or problems that had to be overcome.

**The target group** comprises women prisoners in the 20 - 45 age group, frequently of ethnic minority origin and particularly from the Antilles – five islands in the Caribbean sea that form an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Most of the women involved with the DP come from socially disadvantaged environments and have been dependent on social security benefits, with around 15% having a physical disability that prevents them from working. Also, the women often have a low level of self-confidence and do not know how to approach or use the various services to which they are entitled.

**The services or authorities** also presented certain problems. The women's prisons are based in Zwolle, Breda, Utrecht and Evertsoord but in view of the relatively low number of women in

detention and this broad distribution of facilities, it is difficult to detain women in the regions in which they had lived prior to their sentence. Whilst in detention, the women are offered training and advice to help them find and adapt to employment but this support ceases after their release. Unless there is a compulsory probation contact, a probation department is not involved in any aspect of aftercare. In addition, the Ministry of Justice and the probation departments do not really have specialist knowledge in terms of finding or negotiating the most suitable educational or employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

## BUILDING THE PARTNERSHIP

The DP believes that, if you want to reintegrate women prisoners, you need to work on all areas of their lives simultaneously and the support provided must be intensive. However, the main focus of the DP is on employment, as this is the central factor in the rehabilitation of former detainees. Statistics in the Netherlands suggest that there is a 70% less chance of re-offending when people have a job. However, at the beginning, finding a job is one step too far for most female prisoners, as the most important issue that has to be dealt with is their families and attempts have to be made to sort out the relationship difficulties and the practical problems, which will occur on their release. As Janice says, *"I have always wanted a better life. I had very bad experiences in my youth and when my son was born I wanted to give him this better life. After Balancing the Future, there are more possibilities for me to reach my goals and now I have finally found a part-time job, working as an empowerment trainer in our second EQUAL project."*



*Thinking about the chances of a new life outside*

The partnership includes agencies or departments that work inside the prison and those which mainly operate outside the prison. During the period in detention, support is provided by the Individuele Traject Begeleider or individualised vocational guidance. Through this Individuele Traject Begeleider (ITB), the training that can take place in the prison is planned, as are the links between this training and work experience outside the prison. ITB also arranges all the paperwork and certificates that the women will need for their lives when they leave the institution. In addition, Delinkwentie & Samenleving (Delinquency and Society), is actively involved in explaining what the DP can offer to the women prisoners. This organisation distributes promotional leaflets and then speaks directly to the female inmates, either individually or during group seminars about how the DP and its partners can provide immediate help. The DP feels that *"Delinkwentie & Samenleving is an organisation that is very well accepted by members of the target group and plays a vital role in their empowerment."*



*Some 70% of female prisoners are mothers*

In terms of those agencies that work mainly outside the prison walls, Zorgconcept (Care Concept) is responsible for employment-related support that includes job mediation, vocational training and education. Zorgconcept also coordinates the work of the external "chain" partners. Questions related to accommodation, which is a big problem for 40% of the women, are covered by Exodus, an NGO with considerable experience in the field of housing. During the round 1 DP, Exodus opened a new house in which female ex-offenders could stay with their children for up to 9 months before they found permanent accommodation. A third partner, Humanitas, offers assistance with all aspects of family life and particularly childcare. Participants helped by Humanitas freely admit that *"it is so good so see that you not alone and you can also share your doubts, feelings and problems with other mothers who are in the same situation as you."*

This combined, intensive support provides the best possible solution to the problems of individuals that occur during and after detention and represents a highly developed and

specialised reintegration service that could not be guaranteed by the prison service and the probation department simply working on their own.

## DEVELOPING THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

During detention, an individual assessment of the potential quality of life of the woman prisoner is made by ITB, or the education department in the prison. This covers housing, employment, finances, health, education, social environment and hobbies. Then a Detention Trajectory Plan, which addresses any problems or deficiencies, is formulated by the ITB in conjunction with all the other partners and the female prisoner. This action plan outlines the process that must be followed if the offender is to find a normal job or some form of subsidised employment and it also includes intermediary steps such as vocational education and training.

Three months before the woman's release, a job coach from Zorgconcept becomes directly involved. The Detention Trajectory Plan is updated and a check is made on the arrangements for the coordination of the different elements of the plan inside and, particularly outside, the institution. Once any other problems have been resolved, the job coach will advise on, and help to arrange, suitable education or training opportunities either inside prison or on release. The focus of Zorgconcept is always on achieving qualifications that are relevant to the employment market.

At the beginning, clear performance agreements are made with each woman and, on release, the job coach supports the woman in her attempts to find employment. Once the woman finds employment, the job coach will also discuss with her the level of commitment that she will have to make in order to keep her new job.

The support from the job coach is available for 6 months up to a maximum period of 12 months and is geared to fostering the woman's independence. Whilst the job coach concentrates on employment aspects, he or she will also check whether problems in other areas of the woman's life are being dealt with adequately by the partners or by other services and will act as a case manager in this respect. As Carin Cox, one of the job coaches explains, *"Most of the women don't have any place to stay when they come out of prison and in the Netherlands you have to have an address or you cannot get any unemployment or social security payments. In Amsterdam, we have been able to arrange more flexible regulations so that help and support is always available for all of our female offenders."*

In addition to providing support for the woman, the job coach also provides support for her new employer, if this appears to be necessary. Most of the employers have had little or no experience of hiring female ex-offenders and the job coaches can help them to understand the behaviour of these new employees which has, of course, been influenced by the time that they spent in prison.

## MAINSTREAMING THE METHOD

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The results of the first round DP which was called [Toekomst in Balans: maatschappelijke integratie van vrouwelijke gedetineerden](#) (Balancing the Future: The social integration of female prisoners) were very impressive. Some 50 to 70 women were helped each year and of these women, it is estimated that only 7% of them re-offended which compares very well with the normal re-offending rate of 35%. The DP now believes that there is a major opportunity to mainstream its outcomes throughout the Netherlands, particularly as there has been a recent change in the policy of the Dutch Government. Whilst the Ministry of Justice has decided that the Prison and Probation Service must work more closely together, this has to be done within the confines of the penal institutions. The Ministry has ruled that the Local Authorities in the Netherlands are now responsible for the aftercare of offenders. In the light of these new political developments, the second round DP aims to shape the co-operation between the Prison Service, Probation Department and Local Authorities.

In essence, the new DP has defined its mainstreaming strategy right from the drafting of its application for the second round of EQUAL. The whole objective of the DP is to ensure that the method of resettlement that it is now fine-tuning will be used more widely throughout the Netherlands. The DP and its activities have been carefully designed to give mainstreaming the

best possible chance of success. Whilst the Ministry of Justice has been involved right from the start of EQUAL, in the second round three representatives from the Dutch Association of Local Government were invited to join the Board of the DP. These representatives, who are the potential users of the DP's model, come from the cities of Eindhoven, Utrecht and Breda. Being members of the Board they attend meetings four times a year, when they receive reports on the DP's progress and, in between these meetings, they are kept up to date with any new or interesting developments and are also directly involved in the DP's activities. This strategy is already beginning to pay off, as word of the DP's success is spreading across the country to the extent that the DP has been asked to discuss its model with several other local authorities including the three largest Dutch cities - Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague.

## MAKING THE CASE FOR THE MODEL

Another important development in the course of 2006 will be the commissioning of an external, scientific research study on the DP and its outcomes. This will attempt to determine the success of the project's mediation activities on behalf of ex-offenders in relation to updating their skills and qualifications, finding employment, having a satisfactory quality of life and operating in a stable family environment. The outcomes of this piece of research will be important in two respects:

- Firstly, the DP will be making a formal application to the Ministry of Justice to have its approach certified and recognised as a suitable and effective model for the resettlement and reintegration of female offenders within the Netherlands;
- Secondly, the results of the research and the certification should help the DP to make a convincing case to local authorities for the introduction of its model.

When the Ministry of Justice ruled that local authorities should be responsible for aftercare, no additional financial resources were allocated to help them to undertake this extra task. However, the DP intends to come up with a clever bit of "social accounting" in order to prove that by investing in its approach, the cost of providing other local authority services will be reduced. For example, if the DP helps a woman to find appropriate accommodation and suitable childcare arrangements immediately on her release, then she will be much less likely to make repeated



*A bit of mutual support is always welcome*

demands on the housing department or to become yet another difficult case for the social services department. Thus, the total time and money that the local authority might otherwise have had to spend in addressing her problems will be saved.

In the light of the new and ever changing political agenda, the DP works closely with the other two DPs in the Netherlands that are operating in prisons. In many ways, these projects are complementary in terms of target groups as [MATCH](#) works with young offenders and [Net Werk II](#) focuses on drug addicts. Together, they have formed a network called NEON NL (National Ex-Offender Network – Netherlands) and will be making a contribution to EQUAL's European level thematic activities on the topic of (ex)-offenders.

Finally, the DP is taking every opportunity to disseminate its model. It is promoting its goals and methodology to prisons, probation services and local authorities through a quarterly newsletter, tailored information folders and the [project web site](#). "EQUAL has allowed us to experiment and, in our case, we believe very successfully," says the Project Leader, Trudy Hoeymakers-Wijnen, "now with EQUAL's emphasis on mainstreaming and the resources that are available to support this activity, there is every possibility that our model will be used by a significant number of local authorities throughout the Netherlands."

## Contact

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N. B. New DP and TP web sites will shortly be in action and, initially, they will be able to be accessed from this original site.

[Link to EQUAL Database description](#)