

Case Study: Oranje Huis (the Netherlands)

[Blijf Groep](#), a Dutch women's shelter in Noord-Holland and Flevoland (the Netherlands) has been working on domestic violence for nearly 40 years and offers varying services. Blijf Groep has two temporary shelters for women in crisis due to domestic violence, which are linked to an additional 5 shelters where they can stay for up to 6 - 9 months. Challenges identified over the years related to issues such as: how to find more effective ways of addressing domestic violence, how to prevent repeated cycles of violence. The same women were coming to the shelters and there was interest in contacting them sooner to minimize the long-term damages.

In 1998 Blijf Groep developed Domestic Violence Support Centres in several cities, which provide services for domestic violence survivors who do not necessarily need shelter. Both women and men can come to these support centres for individual help or for counseling with their partners, as well as for information and advice. It was in these support centres that social workers for the first time came into direct contact with the perpetrators, primarily the husband or boyfriend of the woman seeking help.

The Oranje Huis (Orange House) pilot was developed from 2008 to mid-2011, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, with a main purpose to develop a new approach in women's sheltering. This followed a study in 2006 that showed improvements could be made in response to women and men who wanted to end the violence but not necessarily the relationship. The initiative has demonstrated positive results and was designed based on the experience of the shelters, and insights learned through engagement with both the victim and the perpetrator, which was confirmed by research, academic knowledge, and international experiences in domestic violence, a [survey](#) done in the women's shelters in the Netherlands, and literature on child abuse, intergenerational transmission of violence and parenthood and parenting.

The Oranje Huis is a Dutch women's shelter, but with a new approach, in which the shelter is visible and recognisable and has a disclosed location. On the front of the building it clearly states "Oranje Huis", it is included in the telephone book, there is active promotion of the services located at the shelter, and, the media as well as many guests have been invited to the shelter. There is a Domestic Violence Support Centre within the shelter, to provide services collectively under one roof, with the main objective to improve- from the earliest stage possible- support for people who are facing domestic violence. Research has shown that victims who enter a women's shelter have experienced domestic violence over an average period of nine years. The Oranje Huis model aims to be convenient for individuals coming from different locations, to increase its accessibility and help reduce the downward spiral of domestic violence sooner. Every client gets a tailored programme that involves the perpetrator with a clear view on parenthood and specific attention on children.

The five main features of the Oranje Huis shelter are:

1. An open setting
2. All services under the same roof
3. A new concept of safety
4. Family programs including the perpetrator
5. Separation of accommodation and help and advice

An open setting

The work is done in an open setting. This means that the women and children that stay in the shelter can receive family members or other guests during their stay, and that the individual sessions with the husband as well as the family sessions take place in the same building. It also means that the shelter is housed in the same building that also provides other social services on domestic violence for people who do not need shelter but who do need help. People who live in the neighbourhood can come to the Oranje Huis for individual or family sessions as well as for information and advice. The organization also offers group sessions for both the resident guests and external participants.

Classes offered include: anger management, parenting skills, and coping strategies to deal with consequences of abuse for children and parents, among others. The Oranje Huis is community-based and uses local and regional resources to support both the woman and her children, as well as the man in working towards a future without violence. Professional workers are assisted by volunteers in the Oranje Huis. It is a shelter that is not hidden but stands openly and proudly in the neighbourhood and makes the statement: yes, domestic violence is a social problem and we can help you to do something about it!

Combination of different services

Through the combination of all services on domestic violence in one building, everyone can be provided with a suitable program. Most of the clients don't need shelter after domestic violence but need individual help or counseling involving both partners, as well as information and advice. Providing these diverse services in an easy way helps to address domestic violence sooner so the downward spiral of domestic violence is stopped.

A new perspective on safety

The perspective on safety is twofold: actual protection of clients and increasing sense of security. Though the location of the facility is not concealed, the shelters are professionally protected with 24 hour staffing, seven days a week. A risk assessment is also done upon arrival of any client who seeks shelter. In close cooperation with the police it is determined whether a client gets a code "green" (no domestic violence), a code "orange" (domestic violence but without danger once in a protected shelter) or a code "red" (domestic violence and in danger, even in an environment with around the

clock staffing). If it is then established that a client is in immediate danger, a safe solution is sought without delay. This may be in the form of a placement at a shelter in a different concealed location in the Netherlands, or (if the risk is very high) in the programme of 'Safe Houses.' The Oranje Huis works closely together with the police, similar to the other shelters. Clients with code "red" often come from a relationship with a man who has a criminal record or are assessed to be in danger of femicide and honour-related crimes.

The experience of domestic violence can impact a basic sense of security. Oranje Huis prioritizes safety without hiding the woman and cutting her off from her social environment. Safety is sought in promoting awareness of domestic violence as a serious social issue that can occur in every family and for which individual and family solutions can be found. Safety is created by de-escalating the situation, by trying to strengthen social cohesion, both on an individual and a social level, and by mobilizing protective factors in the social environment of the families in which the violence has occurred. Every time a woman leaves the shelter, a safety plan is made. Additionally, a safety plan is made for each child so that they know how to react in unsafe situations and whom they can turn to for help.

Family Programmes

During the first period of 6 weeks in the Oranje Huis the family-workers not only work with the woman and her children, but they also have sessions with her partner (who in most cases, is her husband and the perpetrator of the abuse) and with the family as a whole. Significant other family members who can support the victim or speak up to the perpetrator (or can support him on his path towards change) and people who can provide safety for the children involved are mobilised. The crisis and the sense of urgency of all family members is used to create a new dynamic within the family.

The aim of the 6-week stay in the crisis center of the Oranje Huis is to bring into perspective all factors that have led to the violence and the patterns of the cycle of violence but also to motivate all members of the family for change. This is being done by assisting them to analyse their input in the cycle of violence, the solutions they might see and to make a family-plan for a future without violence for all. This might be a future as a family, with or without professional help; with or without the support of significant others; or that the couple separates yet finds a safe way to raise the children together as parents (again with or without professional care and involving other family members or educators).

After the first 6 weeks the client chooses the next step in her program. She can either go back to her partner with a safety plan for her and her children; go to family or friends; claim her house; find another house to live without her partner; or go to another shelter. In the shelter, women and their children can stay for approximately six months to recuperate from the violence they have experienced and learn new skills needed to live

on their own and create a safe environment for themselves as well as their children. Whenever possible help is also provided on how to build a healthy parental relationship between both parents and how to raise the children together while separated. The experience in the first year shows that this new way of working can create a breakthrough in families and make fathers more aware of the consequences of domestic violence, including those on children.

Separation of living quarters and help

In addition to the crisis clients experience when they enter a shelter, they often have to share living quarters with a lot of other women and children in crisis. This together with the 24 hour/7days a week presence of social workers can give clients the impression that they are under constant surveillance. This can create additional stress, irritation and conflict. At the Oranje Huis every family has its own living space with its own kitchen and shower. This gives clients the chance to find peace and quiet in their own place. It also provides the mother the possibility to have greater independence in parenting. The sessions with the social workers are scheduled and take place in another part of the building. Social workers only visit the clients living quarters when they are invited to do so. In the Oranje Huis up to 12 women with children can be housed at any given time in the first 6 weeks. In the additional shelter, up to 9 women with their children can be housed. There are 16 full time staff working at the Oranje Huis, including 8 professional aid workers and 4 facility staff.

Results

- Research shows that women feel secure in the Oranje Huis even though the Oranje Huis is not a concealed location.
- After being in a traditional shelter, about 40% of the women return to their partner. In the Oranje Huis only 19% returns to their partner.
- Though additional research has to be done, there are indications that the Family Programs help women be realistic in their expectations. Because the perpetrator is directly involved in making the family plan, the client is confronted with the positive and negative sides of her relationship. This makes the client more realistic about the possibilities for change.
- The Family approach leads more directly to a breakthrough in the pattern of domestic violence. No client leaves the shelter without a safety plan for her and her children.

Lessons learned

- Children are greatly affected by domestic violence and they need a lot of attention in the programs. Every child now gets his/her own program, and we make a safety plan for every child.
- Within the first six weeks of the programme, priority was placed on deciding the family plan and making decisions for the future. However, the pilot revealed that clients preferred to give attention to solving debts, attaining a benefit, finding a new school for their children and other social and economic issues. The focus shifted because clients could not make plans for the future without fixing these problems first.
- The Oranje Huis approach can also be used for other forms of violence, such as elder abuse or child abuse but is not very suitable for human trafficking and other exploitative relationships.
- Clients also want appreciated and requested leisure activities.

Challenges

- The aim of the family program is to work with all family members towards a future without violence. Contacting the men who have abused their wives was a big step for some of workers: training and coaching on the job were necessary to teach social workers to work from a multiple bias point of view while still actively remaining survivor-centred.
- Training and coaching is also needed to maintain a good balance between motivating women who seek help from Oranje Huis within this new way of working and taking care to respect their pace and timing.

Recommendations

- Because of the open environment, co-operation with the police is very important. Security should be provided in which the police are visible and aware of the importance of their response.
- Additional shelters should be available for clients who are in immediate danger and are not safe in an open environment. The police should offer their know-how on safety for specific clients and give advice if there is danger.

Source: Margje de Jong for Blijf Groep: <http://www.blijfgroep.nl/>.