

## PREFACE \*

**The year 2004 was a turbulent year; the terrorist attacks and people's responses to them were felt everywhere, including in our organisation. Yet they did not lead to discord in our organisation or to prejudice against particular groups of participants; in that respect, fortunately, the terrorists did *not* succeed.**

### **Responsibility for one's own actions**

We consider our boys autonomous individuals who have wishes and dreams. Unfortunately they lack the skills to maintain a position on the job market, and therefore fail to advance in our society.

Our opinion was and is that employment is the best means towards integration. From our own experience we know that the mastery of a trade will help to keep one's self-respect in difficult times.

We require our participants to take responsibility for their own actions and choices. Our pupils should not view or present themselves as victims of difficult circumstances and merely cry for help. The successful participants in *Herstelling* are the living proof that you do not need to be a prisoner of your social environment; they show that it is indeed possible to break away from your background. *Herstelling* offers support in this process. We assist our participants in acquiring a self-supporting position on the job market, and we are convinced that the great majority of employers wish to be of help as well, even if only out of enlightened self-interest.

During the past year we succeeded in keeping about half of the boys entrusted to us away from the streets, and were able to guide them towards jobs or professional training programmes. Participants were particularly successful if they related well to their supervisors. This tells us that, besides just working with them, supervisors should spend much time talking with the participants and showing them they care. Daily contact, in a steady and orderly environment, is an absolute condition for a smooth learning process. The *Stelling* fortresses of Amsterdam – situated in beautiful surroundings – offer exactly the right setting.

Hardly any of our participants has finished his schooling. Not only are the subjects taught at school too abstract, the boys also often feel lost at school. This highlights the need for *Herstelling's* policy to work, in small groups, on gaining trust and commitment. In this process it is important that the pupils accept that we ask them to account for the quality and quantity of their work. Especially at the beginning this may be difficult and lead to conflicts; conflicts that we do not avoid. In contrast to what they are used to, we do not have the habit to look the other way when young people have a wrong attitude towards working or when they are failing their tasks.

### **An underclass in the making**

The year 2004 was a turbulent year also because the number of participants with social and emotional problems increased.

Incidentally, this is a result of Amsterdam's success at dealing with problematic youth: slowly but surely Amsterdam is succeeding in reaching the most difficult groups, particularly thanks to the youth services of the *Maatwerk* Foundation and an increasingly consistent approach. Therefore, despite the fact that half of our participants are dismissed or drop out, we have still gained, precisely because we now have a better insight into the most difficult groups.

These insights are grounds for serious concern, as the *Herstelling* Foundation has made clear before. Most of them school dropouts, many of these boys are out on the streets and 'develop' themselves there. Clearly this is an underclass in the making, with its own rules and behavioural standards. If this growing group of people who do not feel at home in our city are never going to fit in, they will become receptive to misanthropic ideas, with all possible consequences. Some of our participants may have radical ideas, but often only out of a deep-rooted sense of 'not belonging'. Feelings of powerlessness and outrage are the result. This we should understand first, before taking further action. Close collaboration with all parties involved is an absolute requirement. This implies that parents should be called to account for their lack of interest in their children. If possible, *Herstelling* makes house calls to boys who do not show up for work. This provides us insight into their home situations, and the resulting picture is often shocking. There is often no parental interest or incentive whatsoever to go to school or work; quite the contrary. Many of our failing participants come from families where any form of parenting or upbringing, including the development of a conscience, is sorely lacking. In this social environment criminality is considered normal; family life is dominated by violence and social derailment. This has dramatic consequences. These children learn hardly anything at school and drop out prematurely, their teachers often sighing with relief. It will be clear that precisely these youngsters become alienated from society. Children growing up under such circumstances have no understanding or sense of the intentions and emotions of others. As a result they frequently clash with others.

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### **24-hour-supervision, parenting support and practical training**

Changing the behaviour of boys who drop out of our programme is difficult, if not impossible. Sometimes all we can do is protecting the well-meaning participants from such boys: tough customers who make life a misery for boys showing ambition, as they consider them 'defectors and show-offs'. Provocation and intimidation are their trademarks, getting the upper hand over the supervisor is their goal. These blokes require a different kind of supervision, 24 hours a day. They are relatively few, but their influence in the streets is considerable.

At the *Herstelling* Foundation their behaviour is not tolerated. As we wish to provide a safe haven, we should not be ashamed about removing half of our participants or separating them from the hard core. However, dismissal alone is not enough.

Dismissed boys and their families should receive mandatory parenting support. In addition, the *VMBO* schools (schools for general pre-vocational secondary education) should be improved as soon as possible. Specifically, these schools should pay

more attention to practical training, not out of nostalgia for the old technical schools, but based on the experience that general non-vocational education (irrespective of students' aptitudes or interests) has disastrous consequences for these youngsters.

### **Administrative overload**

Our annual report will make clear that our work is complex and that *Herstelling* is being confronted with new problems. Therefore we are of the opinion that there should be room for an active and modern organisation characterized by nonconformism and an aversion to bureaucracy. However, in the fight against unemployment we are facing much, often *too* much administrative paperwork, keeping us from our actual job. We are being overloaded with accounting and reporting requirements, the objectives of which are not always clear. It would be good to re-evaluate *who* should know *what* and *why*, and tailor the requirements accordingly. Of course we think that this system of checks is important, but please leave some of it to our own responsibility and keep our clientele in mind! Never should a culture arise where procedures are more important than substance; we would find that impossible to swallow!

It is in the direct relationship with our participants that we should deliver proof of good services, and we will deliver that proof if we are able to keep 50% of the boys on track. Our basic principle remains that everyone should have an equal opportunity to lead a free and safe life, in which a living can be made on one's own.

*Albert v.d. Lugt*  
Director

*“Never should a culture arise where procedures are more important than substance.”*

*\* Source: Herstelling Foundation, Annual Report 2004*

### **What is the Herstelling Foundation?**

*The Province of North-Holland and the City of Amsterdam are working together in a unique employment scheme. People with little or no prior job experience can participate in maintenance and repair of the "Defence Line of Amsterdam". This is a series of fortresses and defence constructions dating back to the beginning of the 20th century. This very special and highly successful project offers participants a chance to prepare themselves for a regular job or further professional training. In spite of the strength of the economy and high demand for employees in our country there are unfortunately still thousands of unemployed for whose problems society does not have a clear-cut solution. These include school dropouts, long-term unemployed persons with little experience and no diplomas and people looking for suitable work after a long period of illness. Re-entering the job market is impossible for them without help. Herstelling Foundation offers that help, also ensuring that the Defence Line of Amsterdam is preserved for posterity.*