

THE LINK

An educational facility for school refusing adolescents

and it's mental health spouse(s)





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What to expect?

- The Link as an alternative educational program
- The marriage between the Link and mental health care
- Other marriages between education and mental health care in the Netherlands

Alternative Educational Programs for School Refusal

- Often employed as Tier 3 interventions for youth with chronic and severe absenteeism (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014)
- Accommodating school refusing youth in a school setting adapted to their needs
- May play an important role in helping adolescents with school refusal and an autism spectrum disorder to re-engage with education (Brouwer-Borghuis, Heyne, Sauter, & Scholte, 2019)

Where we came from

- Established in August 2007 within a special education secondary school
- Since august 2015 part of the Collaboration (“Samenwerkingsverband”)
- Services 25 secondary schools (13,000 students) in the region of Almelo
- Referral made by staff from the adolescent’s original school
- Currently place for 25 adolescents



25



13000



25

Population

(August 2007 – November 2015)

Severe

- Most adolescents were completely absent (M=27 weeks) from school
- At least 1/3 of the adolescents experienced being bullied
- Almost 1/2 of the adolescents had suicidal thoughts

Chronic

- At least 1/3 of the adolescents already had attendance problems during primary school

Complex

- > 1/2 of the adolescents were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder
- Almost 1/3 of the adolescents had a primary diagnosis of anxiety or depressive disorder
- > 1/3 of the adolescents met criteria for at least one comorbid disorder, mostly anxiety or depressive disorders

Key interventions

Aim: reducing school-related anxiety and normalising school attendance.

(1)

An adapted educational setting that redresses a range of school-related factors associated with the development and maintenance of SR

(2)

Adoption of a **CBT orientation** by Link professionals

(3)

Collaboration between Link staff, the adolescent, parents, and all other involved professionals

Collaboration with mental health care

- We work together with all regional mental health care facilities
- Mental health care professionals are present at our six-weekly multidisciplinary evaluations
- When possible, we arrange mental health care via at.groep Zorg, the partner we hold a more exclusive and intensive relationship with
- Therapist at.groep Zorg is present at The Link

Our dating phase

We were looking for a partner to live with us and help us in supporting our children when re-engaging school

Management fell in love first

It took some years with ups-and-downs to grow into a more steady relationship



Strengths in our marriage

We know the other well

We live together under the
roof of education

We have overlapping chores
and responsibilities

We keep working on our
communication

We are really passionate
about our children



Difficulties in our marriage

The Link as an educational partner can be a more pressing “personality”. We are always aware of schedules that need to be followed. Mental health care is often a more laid back “personality”

Financing the overlapping chores and responsibilities



What we wish for the future

For every student to profit
from our marriage, even when
another mental health care
facility is involved too



Other marriages in the Netherlands

“Weten Wat Werkt”

Anonymous indirect quotes from the ‘Weten wat Werkt’ Project

“Our marriage is more or less an arranged marriage”

“For us (MH) it is good to live under the roof of education”

“Evaluate the relationship frequently, and when it is really difficult, ask for a mediator”



A Final Thought!

Chantal's advice

Welcome the ideas and perspective of the other partner, like Robert. C. Dodds said:

"The goal in marriage is not to think alike but to think together"



Thank You!



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