



Erasmus Study Visit Rotterdam Region

Elevate Glasgow Public Social Partnership

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Scottish Drugs Forum**



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The City of Glasgow is growing in opportunities for people who face employment barriers, and the Employability Public Social Partnership (PSP), **Elevate-Glasgow**, is a prime example.

Elevate links NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde with over 30 Third Sector organisations to shape personalised employment support and a range of professional development opportunities to people in recovery.

Glasgow Council on Alcohol is the lead partner for this work, while Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) Chief Executive Officer David Liddell chairs the activity of the Placements and Volunteering Work Stream of the PSP.

This means that SDF brings over twelve years of learning through our award-winning **Addiction Worker Training Project (AWTP)**, along with over 30 years organisational expertise in policy, workforce development, user involvement, quality improvement and training.

As lead officer for AWTP, I was excited by an opportunity for a staff mobility study visit through funding secured by the PSP and quickly applied. Successful in securing a place on

this sought-after venture, I travelled with two colleagues from **Phoenix Futures** and the **Scottish Recovery Consortium**, to the Netherlands. There I learned how employability for disadvantaged groups is delivered and how employers and service providers engage with people in recovery.

Hosted by colleagues from the **Dutch Foundation for Innovation in Welfare 2 Work** (DFW2W), the study visit was funded by Erasmus Plus. In partnership with Elevate-Glasgow and **Light on the Path**, the Dutch Foundation hosted three solid days of exposure to progressive, innovative, inclusive and entrepreneurial models of employability for people in recovery.

The concept of entrepreneurship flowed throughout the visit and it was clear from meeting the Chairman of DFW2W - **Carla de Vreij**, and Creative Director **Pieter van Schie**, that social entrepreneurship is in the spirit of the Dutch people and indeed the nation's culture. This was apparent throughout our first meeting over some delicious Dutch coffee - capturing perfectly the passion evident in their work.

With an international focus, the DFW2W delivers expert projects in research and knowledge / partnership exchange, supporting the Dutch Government and European Commission in the fields of (informal) education, employment, labour mobility, social inclusion, counselling, cultural activities and beneficial ways to work with disadvantaged groups.

With the national and youth unemployment rates steadily decreasing over the last 12 years in the Netherlands and currently at its lowest, I was keen to understand the nature of projects contributing to this trend.

First stop was **Van Dalen Veilingkisten** in the Rotterdam region of Papendrecht. A young and specialised company, Veilingkisten crafts wood products and is a terrific example of a young entrepreneur who had to overcome his own difficulties.



With its expansion, the industrial site of Papendrecht is the perfect home to a fantastic workshop which boasts a small but strong team of craftsmen.

The team supports marginalised young people and young people with disabilities, creating multiple learning opportunities within a highly skilled team.

I watched as young men created intricate wood work pieces. Producing quality goods for high end commercial clients at home and abroad - each young person was getting

something of real worth and value for their onward development - increasing their social capital through work and learning hands-on skills for further employment.

Swiftly moving on to a second visit, we travelled with Pieter to Dordrecht where we found **Opnieuw & Co.** This literally translates in English to “*Again & Co*”, where the spirit of renewal, within a professional social enterprise was seen.

Creating employment developing skills for people throughout the departments of its business, Opnieuw & Co collects used-products on a monumental scale.

Up-cycling and pricing competitively, the company not only creates social employment, but increases public spending capacity by providing an affordable alternative to new products.



Company Director Marcel van Gogh described to us a business model that that thrives on social employment of marginalised groups through five locations in the Netherlands. The company offers students work placements and opportunities to learn and develop on the job skills, progressing through the various departments within the company.

We saw people with multiple employment barriers - physical and mental health conditions; long-term unemployment; criminal convictions; and people with drug and alcohol problems, all developing skills in areas such as tailoring, engineering, pricing, valuing, crafting and repairing.

In addition, a highly skilled front of house staff team with the very same barriers attentively looked after the scores of customers coming through its doors.

I was hugely impressed by what appeared to be a very professional and profitable operation. With 60 volunteers supporting their work, more than 450 employees work at Opnieuw & Co, of which 150 are employed, with others working temporarily through wage subsidy schemes and a view to building skills towards securing further employment.

That evening, we travelled to **Hotspot Hutspot in Rotterdam**, where for €8 Euros we had an incredible three course meal. An initiative which thrives on volunteers, amazingly, children work throughout the restaurant, to learn about food and cooking.



Two young boys served our table and took great delight in doing so. Between service they were simply children - playing on scooters, running, exploring and kicking their football around the large garden which keeps the kitchen well stocked with herbs and vegetables.

The Hotspot Hutspot is a beautiful place in the middle of the hustle and bustle of the Rotterdam estates and safe place for children to come together to learn and grow.

The Hutspot also gives opportunities to people in recovery - here we met the Kitchen Manager Jacob, who shared with us his experience of a successful high-end culinary career, heroin addiction and subsequent recovery. One of the Elevate volunteers, this being his third of a five-week work placement, who was exhausted from a busy shift and the heat of the kitchen, joined us for some fresh pear juice and shared his experience of living and working in Rotterdam.

Pitched to us as a “traditional” health and care centre for people who use alcohol and drugs, day two of the study visit commenced with a morning at **Bouman GGZ/ Antes Groep** in Rotterdam.

It was here that the work ethic of our hosts really stood out. Against the backdrop of a simply beautiful therapeutic, structured day care community, the themes of treatment, autonomy and work were discussed between us. The latter theme, it soon became apparent, is a critical indeed absolute, necessary and integral part of treatment with Bouman and throughout the Netherlands.



Based in supported work experience within the treatment centre, clients were able to create structure through work and employability - in this model - treatment is work and work is treatment - a little like the therapeutic communities we see in the United Kingdom.

In addition to work on-site, employability and CPD opportunities were also provided to clients who are encouraged and supported to find work in their local communities. Within a sophisticated joined up approach - as the specialist in addiction care and recovery in the Rotterdam area, the Drechtsteden and the South Holland Islands, Bouman intricately involves healthcare, forensic care and criminal justice colleagues in the treatment and reintegration of clients in to Dutch society, through work.

Leaving Bouman, we met with the five participants on the Elevate Study programme for Volunteers, who shared their experiences of working in a variety of placement settings in the Rotterdam region. I was hugely impressed with the appetite of the volunteers for learning just how much they had thrust themselves in to living and working in Holland.



As we left their apartment we went to the **Pauluskerk (St. Paul Church)** in central Rotterdam. Formerly an unofficial supervised injecting facility; the Church's Minister had attracted media attention in providing a safe place for people to use drugs in the basement of the Church.

With the emergence of two Government-endorsed consumption facilities, Pauluskerk has returned to its original roots - supporting the homeless people of Rotterdam, with a specific focus on the refugee community.

The ethos of Pauluskerk is to "help where there is no helper" and we were greeted with the words "the good overcomes evil" in giant letters as we walked in to the fresh, purpose-built Church and day care facility, which reflects the bravery of architecture throughout Rotterdam.

Activities in Pauluskerk are aimed at strengthening people's social capital - providing advice to asylum seekers, social work, therapeutic interventions, space for reflection, creative activities and various language courses.

In addition, the Church is a food bank outlet and used clothes are set out like a boutique store for people to respectfully browse and take according to their need.

There is a bicycle workshop in which people accessing the service are trained - a great skill to develop in the Netherlands where bicycles saturate the roads and have right of way. Access to a GP, a dentist and a hairdresser is also on-site, not to mention 24 spaces for people who need 'bed, bath and bread' - the longest resident of Pauluskerk being there for over two years.

The final day of our study visit exposed us to two very different places of work. The first was **Promen** - an employer which specialises in providing supported and sheltered work placements for disabled people.



Our hosts from the department responsible for “*Development of Talents and People*” set the scene by describing how Dutch law has seen a shift requiring Municipalities (Dutch Local Authorities) to think more entrepreneurially in employability interventions.

Co-incidentally, the Dutch have also moved to place a degree of pressure on people receiving welfare via ‘social participation’. Essentially to receive welfare, Dutch residents must ‘contribute’ to society through work in some way - the nature of this work being adapted depending on need. Promen is owned by seven Municipalities in the Netherlands, and offers labour in the context of social employment and participation.

Adopting a socially conscious model, Promen is profitable. The organisation is made up of several departments and the model is fluid - creating opportunities for people to work through and across departments in Production, Cleaning, Greening and Outplacements.

1,500 people work for Promen - all have disabilities or for another reason (such as an addiction / mental health background) have experienced issues with employment. Staff are supported by job coaches who work for Promen and are recruited from the regions of Central Holland and IJsselgemeenten; from Gouda, Capelle and IJssel. Ultimately, Promen looks to close the gap in access to employment opportunities and one of the ways of doing this is through subsidised external Outplacements - people receiving employment in schools, restaurants, and local authorities, with an assessment of their capacity for the position calculating the level of subsidy. A tour of the production site at Promen, and ad-hoc discussions with workers revealed a skilled, busy, happy workforce who took great pride in their production work.

Our final visit was to a farm - **De Molenwei** in Rotterdam. As a children's farm, the purpose of the facility is to provide education in animal welfare - teaching respect towards animals and exposure to a range of wildlife. De Molenwei has linked a classroom and a school garden, where primary schools can benefit from nature and environmental education.



This probably felt like the most relaxed working environment and as an animal lover, I could appreciate the value of students attending here to care for the animals while learning about work.

Pieter described to me how this was a special placement, creating opportunities for people who could develop softer skills, before being exposed to a more intensive work placement.

That said, hard work did take place! We met Anna, one of the Elevate work placement Volunteers who gave us a spirited and passionate tour. With an excellent knowledge base and bags of confidence, the value of this type of work for Anna, and indeed any trainee in this type of work, was clear. The very physical labour aspect was also it seemed, very tiring.

As a recognised training company, it is here that people learn the necessary skills, tasks and work of an animal care giver - preparing people for the increased intensity of more mainstream employment.

The study visit was fantastic. We were exposed to a wide range of unique employment options for marginalised groups - employment options that work on a massive scale and create opportunities for onward development.

In turn, I was able to discuss with colleagues the value of people with lived experience of addiction recovery, contributing towards service delivery in drug and alcohol projects. I sensed that in Holland, the Dutch were more cautious around this aspect of employability.

Work ethic and entrepreneurialism were key themes - the latter is a word I rarely, if ever hear day to day in my own work, however it was a solid theme throughout the three days of visits.

I was pleased to have had opportunities to sample Dutch culture as well - we dined in restaurants such as **Villa Augustus** and **Hotel New York**. Augustus has a garden covering 1.5 hectares - incorporating a vegetable garden, an orchard, an Italian garden and a small wood, inspiring the menus that the kitchen provides - very in tune with the theme of the visit.



Dutch architecture was monumental and hugely impressive. While we found the occasional traditional Dutch Windmill in 'the Green Heart', industry and architecture has flourished since the city was flattened by the bombs of World War II. The ports, the Erasmus Bridge, Cube Houses, the Rotterdam Marketplace and the skyline of skyscrapers are testament to this.

My sense is that the success of the Dutch employment model comes through building on the principles that exist within the culture - the strengths of work and entrepreneurialism. It is not something that can simply be replicated, as it is our strengths that we must look to in Scotland. We must also to further our work in creating meaningful employment for marginalised groups, which is currently being achieved through the work of the PSP and our own organisations.

This truly has been a fantastic opportunity with much to reflect on; many things to discuss with my colleagues in the Employability field in Scotland, and should any opportunities for work of mutual benefit with our hosts at the Dutch Foundation for Innovation in Welfare to Work present, I would snap them up in a heartbeat.