

Implementing NVR in teams of Sporen: an ongoing process

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In this text I would like to sketch the process of the implementation of NVR in 'Sporen vzw', an organization in the Youth Care in Belgium, how it started and how over the years more and more actions were taken for implementing NVR in the teams. First, in short, I like to present the organization 'Sporen vzw'. Then I sketch how little by little NVR ideas were spread. Finally I describe the process which is running in the teams 'De Pas' and 'Traject'.

Description of the organization "Sporen vzw"

Sporen vzw is a non-profit organization and child and family welfare service in the special youth care in Flanders (Leuven, Belgium) which provides guidance and assistance to children, youngsters and their family with educational and behavioural difficulties in the family, in schools, with personal psychological and emotional problems. Often there are also problems in the family (divorces, family conflicts), at work, financial, housing, in the neighbourhood. Seven units have a residential ward, one unit only offers ambulant guidance and one team focuses on the school situation.

Sporen vzw offers :

- (1) contextual guidance and assistance at home, in the family and their network, school, neighbourhood (mobile and ambulant assistance and family therapy),
- (2) residential care in different units for children and adolescents (with possibility for time-out and residential caretaking in case of a crisis), and in the residential care units for adolescents also the possibility for a guidance living independently,
- (3) support at school (in case of problems or skipping class) or search for a school alternative (day program if school is no more possible). More information can be found on the website:

www.sporen.be.

The team of **Unit 'De Pas'** is responsible for 15 integral guidances: individual assistance and family therapy, support of the family and network, in the residence, at school etc. Most youngsters are mainly sent by the juvenal judge after a police and legal intervention followed by a stay in a closed residential institution of the government. 'De Pas' has a small residential unit for 4 to 6 adolescents. The team of **Unit 'Traject'** is responsible for 19 integral guidances, and has also a residential unit for adolescents. 'Traject' has a living group for 4 to 6 boys, next to 4 studio's where adolescents of plus 17 years can stay. The age of the youngster is - in comparison with 'De Pas' - younger and wider, from 14 to 18 years old. Whereas for the moment, two-thirds of the boys in 'De Pas' are 17, and will become major in a little while or by the end of the year.

Educational policy

Parallel with the implementation of solution focused approaches, found in ideas and models like Signs of Safety (Andrew Turnell e.a.) and Partnering for Safety (Sonja Parker e.a.), in tools like Words & Pictures (Susan Essex e.a.) and in literature from authors as Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg, Michael Durrant e.a. (see Sporen's website: www.opgroeieninveiligheid.be, which means 'Growing up into safety'), gradually the ideas of NVR find acceptance in several units of the organization.

Non-violent resistance, New authority and Vigilant care are concepts in this new approach that connect well with these solution focused approaches. More, NVR can be linked in a complementary way. In this sense, NVR is more than a source of inspiration, but also offers a model where solution focused and family therapy oriented models come together.

The title of the NVR parents' groups, organized by Sporen, "*Other times, other parenthood*", refers to the aim of NVR and N.A.: a quest for how parents and other authority figures like educators and teachers can develop (a new) authority for the benefit of the development and the safety of children. And here, the concepts of NVR join the solution focused approaches: to create a context which offers safety to children and youngsters because parents and other authority figures surround and raise them from a united approach.

How little by little NVR got spread

It **started in 2009**. The team of unit 'De Pas' got stuck in their residential work. The colleagues were confronted with serious aggressive and antisocial behavior the boys showed in the house: not willing to get up and to go to school, disobedient and uncooperative, even rebellious behavior, escaping during the night and using drugs and drinking alcohol. More, these youngsters formed a sort of network with other adolescents also guided and/or staying in a residential care setting in the environment of Leuven, finding each other in places like parks or the station (we spoke about "the living group at the station"). The educators felt very uncomfortable and powerless, just like the parents did. They also didn't succeed in handling the situation. But they too did not succeed in forming a network together with the parents and other welfare colleagues responsible for these boys. Finally, several boys has been sent away.

It is than that Dr. Hendrik van Moorter, in those days psychiatrist in OBC ter Wende (a similar organization in Leuven) brought in the ideas of NVR. A year later (**Nov. 2010**), a **study day** 'Nonviolent resistance' (with psychologist Jan Hoet as speaker) was organized in a cooperation between Sporen vzw, OBC ter Wende and the Police of Leuven. Soon after, several staff members of Sporen participated in a first two days training 'Practical introduction in NVR', by Hendrik van Moorter & Philippe Collart. The following years, several teams of Sporen followed this training. Interested in the ideas of Omer, several colleagues followed a NVR training and step by step NVR concepts were spread and even brought into practice.

Since 2012, also NVR trainings for parents are organized twice a year in Sporen. Parents of children guided in one of the units (mobile and residential) of Sporen, can participate in a series of 4 to 5 parents evening meetings '*Other times, other parenthood*', where the concepts of NVR, New Authority and Vigilant care are explained and practiced (analyses of cases brought by the parents themselves, homework and exercises, demonstrations and role plays).

For your information:

together with the colleagues of OBC ter Wende, **Sporen will present a workshop concerning the NVR parents' groups at the NVR Conference in Malmö** (May 26 & 27, 2016).

After the study day 'Vigilant care' in May 2014 (for more information see once again www.opgroeieninveiligheid.be), several initiatives were taken to implement NVR in the broader organization.

First, since **September 2014** a NVR steering committee was established, which discusses and takes initiatives to implement NVR on different levels of the organization.

And so, the NVR intervision groups started in **November 2014**: every two months colleagues of all the teams of Sporen can participate at these meetings where they can learn by practicing (p.e. role play) and exchanging experiences. The organization and the subjects of these meetings are prepared by the NVR steering committee.

In the second place: the management of Sporen decided to organize trainings in a more systematic way. So, Idan Amiel and his **team of The New Authority Center** (Tel Aviv) were asked to present their Professional Program for NVR & NA implementation in Sporen, starting with both the teams 'De Pas' and 'Traject'.

NVR training and process in the teams 'De Pas' and 'Traject'

In the first three days NVR training in Sporen (**February 2015**) by Idan Amiel, Nir Sonnenberg, Galit Siegman and Tal Maimon, besides all team members of 'De Pas' and 'Traject', also the general manager Jan Tibo and the staff members responsible for training and coaching participated.

Although most of the colleagues already had read the books of Omer and had followed some NVR training, they still found this training very interesting. Not only the concepts of NVR and N.A. were presented in a different and captivating way, but also the exercises in small groups where NVR tools were practiced in a concrete manner, were very informative.

After this training, two initiatives were taken to support bringing NVR into practice:

- monthly skype supervision sessions with the trainers Idan and Nir : both teams had the opportunity to have supervision where cases could be presented and discussed. These skype supervision sessions started in **April 2015** with a monthly frequency. During these skype sessions, case managers could ask questions, give feedback and get advice and hints concerning the running NVR process. All these skype sessions were experienced as a supporting and an instructive process. New ideas were taken within next steps in the guidance.

- the "buddy-system" was installed in April 2015: if a case manager (rather unfamiliar in doing NVR) wants to start NVR in a guidance, he or she can ask a buddy, a colleague to support and to guide the NVR process in a family. There's a pool of several colleagues who have followed a NVR training and are willing to guide and/or support a NVR project in a guidance. In two cases, the presence of having this support of a buddy was experienced as very positive, both by the case manager as by the family.

And so, several case managers started practicing NVR in some guidances. NVR became a regular subject in the supervision sessions (a meeting every two to three weeks where the case manager is supervised by a staff member or colleague) and in the weekly team meeting. In a few guidances where boys showed aggressive, destructive or deviant behavior, a NVR process was started: beginning with the three baskets exercise, writing the announcement, organizing a supporters meeting and doing sit-ins.

Not only in individual cases NVR was done. Also in the group, NVR tools were tried: like reading an announcement in front of the residential group, doing a sit-in in the unit with the whole group of boys or a reparation act after an aggressive incident.

So you can say that most colleagues got inspired for doing NVR. In general, colleagues took a non-violent attitude, by avoiding escalation, being more present, placing bookmarks, helping each other in practicing the methods of NVR.

Some successes, some failures

Practicing NVR, it's quite a process. Knowing the tools and understanding the 'philosophy' of N.A. is one thing, bringing NVR into practice is another thing.

An example:

In June 2015, there was a debate among the team members. Frustration was growing : youngsters in the group did what they wanted (being regularly under the influence of drugs), without following any rules and experiencing no consequence at all from the educators. They told that reacting in a non-violent way, became more and more difficult. The following remark was made: *we understand the ideas of NVR, but we miss the part of 'resistance'*.

So, this issue then was the subject of the weekly team meeting. Here some questions an answer was looked for:

- How to cope with this situation? What do we need to go into 'resistance'?
- How can we resist in a non-violent way, without falling in the pattern that 'we have to win [and the youngsters have to obey] because we are "the authority" '?
- How can we stay out of that feeling of being 'powerless'? What do we need from each other?
- How can we let go the principle of 'punishing and rewarding'? (in the traditional way)
- What do we need as a team to be more aware of the NVR principles?

Here some remarks team members made during that team process:

- I don't know what to do: to react or not against certain behavior of the boys (p.e when a boy arrives far too late back in the group or leaves the unit without authorization). Everybody of the educators is not reacting in the same way. I feel uncertainty in the team.
- NVR offers many good things like the announcement and the sit-in... How to do the resistance part in the daily life of the group? We need more guidelines to do NVR in our daily residential work.
- We had a training, we learned the theory, but what do we do with that theory in practice? There's uncertainty in bringing it into practice.

Another example:

In the guidance of a boy, the team got stuck in doing the three baskets exercise because the red basket contained so many deviant and troublesome behaviors, that there were more problematic behaviors in the 10% column than in the green basket of 60%: being aggressive, using drugs, being not respectful towards certain team members, smoking cigarettes in his room, jumping from the balcony and other reckless behavior, staying away during a night etc. We had to make a choice and the difficulty was that, in time, team members gave different priority to various behaviors.

In general, in only very few cases a whole NVR route was completed, with variable success. But in several cases NVR tools were used when colleagues thought it could be helpful. Anyway, since the training we noticed fewer aggression incidents in the residence over the last year. We attribute this to the NVR attitude educators took by trying to act in a non-violent way in each situation, and the result of practicing - apart - some NVR methods.

Drawing up a NVR manual

On the one hand, some team members had faith in NVR, and were willing to start or consider a NVR project, on the other hand some colleagues had objections, and needed more instructions. So, colleagues were glad that a next training was organized in **March 2016** with the purpose of making a manual.

In this two days training by Idan and Nir only a part of both the teams 'De Pas and 'Traject' participated. Based on the experiences of practicing NVR in the past year, together with the feedback and advices of the monthly skype sessions, we started writing a manual tuned to the profile and functioning of both teams. The accent lied on: how to adjust the (classic) NVR tools and methods to the specific residential functioning of the units 'De Pas' and 'Traject', where both family therapy and residential care is combined. In small groups, colleagues shared experiences, discussed and drew up the following NVR tools: the announcement, the sit-in versus the SMS (small message sending), the supporters meeting and the reparation act.

The goal of the manual is to offer guidelines which can help colleagues in practicing NVR tools and above all, to be aware of starting a process which is seriously considered and well planned.

Three questions

What we certainly learned during this training days, is that starting and doing a NVR path should be done in a prepared, well reflected and systematic manner.

First: most of the colleagues - as working in the youth care - have a non-violent attitude. That's to say: are empathic, try to avoid escalation, are present, are non-violent. And many colleagues show this non-violent attitude in the daily work. And most of the time, a rather constructive dialogue with children and adolescents is possible: arrangements can be made, rules are working.

But at the other hand: if at a certain moment dialogue isn't possible anymore, NVR can be the next step. The following three questions can be instructive in deciding to start a NVR path:

1° is there (self-)destructive and aggressive behavior?

2° is there a (constructive) dialogue possible?

3° what's the position of the authority figures?

If there's an issue or a problem concerning one of these parameters, there's reason to start NVR. But it's also important to decide in advance on the period the NVR path will be done. If after two months no change at all occurred, limits should be kept and consequences should follow. In that case, this could mean that a time-out of the child in another unit or even a closed ward, is organized.

In other words, one should be aware that a NVR path starts at a certain moment, and stops at another moment.

Guidelines

The manual offers a series of well defined guidelines for case managers in the unit and other team members, to start (yes or no) in a more consciously way a NVR trajectory, to make a step-by-step plan (which period, focus on what behavior) and, via several questions, to discuss the several steps.

For example concerning the SMS: What shall we say? Who will speak? Is reading a letter helping? Where shall we do the SMS? Shall we sit on a chair, or stand up in front of the door? How long will the SMS last (duration)? Which sign shall we arrange to stop the SMS? Who will decide and give that sign to end the SMS? Who can be present in the corridor, in case the youngster leaves his room? Who will be in the group during the SMS? When shall we plan the SMS? How long after the announcement? How many shall we plan in advance? How much time do we foresee between SMS's? Doing this SMS, which reaction of the youngster can we expect during / doing the SMS? What if...? How shall we cope with that reaction? How can we keep calm? Who will decide to stop the SMS in case of an aggressive attack? What shall we say to the other youngsters in the group? How will they be informed that a SMS will take place? Is it necessary to foresee back-up? Who of the colleagues can stay in the group after the SMS? How shall we involve the parents in this NVR path? Shall we involve the parents from the beginning? Who is going to do this? How?

It is plain that not only the answers and the adapted tools are important, also the many questions that should be asked in order to be attentive in practicing NVR with this child and this family in this situation showing this behavior.

Once again, it illustrates that following a NVR path demands reflection and a good preparation.

New views

Beside the insight that doing NVR has a beginning and an ending, new views were learned, like following points of interest colleagues are now aware of:

- Most colleagues have incorporated the 'non-violence' aspect in their attitude. But NVR is **in the first place 'resistance'**. How can we strengthen each team to resist in an active way?
- A **sit-in is different than a SMS**, so it's good to define correctly the specific aspects of a sit-in (in the family) versus a Small Message Sending (in residential work).
- Idem ditto, a **family conference or network meeting is not the same as a supporters meeting**. (In Sporen, organizing family conferences and network meetings are standard in the contextual guidances.) Where in a network conference the child or teen-ager also can be present, and often the adolescent is, in a supporters meeting the youngster is not present/invited. In a family conference, the case manager or leader of this meeting applies the worries to the participants, search for examples of good practice, competences and support in the network and asks solution focused questions out from a 'not knowing' position in order that the participants come to solutions which creates safety for the child (making a safety plan). In a supporters meeting, participants gather to resist; the leader presents rather from an expert position the model of NVR as a valuable series of

methods to resist the aggressive and (self-)destructive behavior. Here, the NVR project is a temporarily phase in the ongoing (solution focused approached) guidance.

- In NVR the focus does not lie on the (change of the behavior of the) child, rather on how the parents as authority figures can resist and persist not tolerating any longer aggressive and (self-) destructive behavior. Same here NVR in the residential care: the **focus lies rather on the team** (than on the child): how can this team confronted with serious intolerable behavior persevere in the resistance? So, having attention to what this aggressive and destructive behavior does to team members, is even important. Taking care for the team doing NVR and for team members whom have been confronted with grave behavior forms a point of special interest.

To be continued

After the two days follow-up training in teams 'De Pas' and 'Traject', three other teams of Sporen, had the three days NVR training from the team of the New Authority Center (with now Efrat instead of Galit). They benefit of the previous process teams 'De Pas' and 'Traject' did, and colleagues were very enthusiastic. Meanwhile, new ideas and accents were collected afterwards in the NVR steering committee. New NVR trainings for other teams are foreseen in the future, next skype sessions are planned and many new topics (themes) can be placed on the agenda of the NVR intervisions where these new ideas and insight can be shared.

So, after all this input, and with new energy, Sporen can continue the process of implementing NVR in the several teams and to assimilate NVR and NA in the educational policy and the mission of Sporen.

We like to thank very much the trainers of The New Authority Center for their inspiring and instructive training and the nice cooperation. We are looking out for the next collaboration in working further out the NVR manual, which can be in his turn helping for colleagues and the other teams.

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