



Zeeuwse
Gronden

psychiatrie
thuis
in de samenleving

New ways of sheltered living: the best of both worlds
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Everyone is searching for a path between autonomy and connectedness. Man's happiness is based on the relationship between these two¹. Between the individual and the family, the space and freedom to make your own choices, but also to be a father, lover, brother of your sister, child of your father and mother, friend and colleague. You can't have the one without the other. As stated, our happiness depends on it.

For people with a serious vulnerability, this goes much further: their health is deeply influenced by the relationship between individual and family, autonomy and connectedness. WHO studies in the 1970s and 1980s indicated that Western people with schizophrenia have a far worse prognosis than people with the same diagnosis in developing countries. In a country like India, where there is still an extensive village and family culture, the prognosis is much more favourable².

Western life, with its emphasis on autonomy, is more complicated than it appears. 'Being yourself' is still the most important tip from psychologists and an ever-recurring slogan in advertising. But in the meantime, you are simply expected to work, be married and have two children. You must be original, but you must never go too far - an impossible task. You have to be an original person and also meet the general standard³. That only gets more complicated if you are not really sure who you are⁴.

In The Netherlands 100,000 people with a severe mental illness are in need of long term help. 20,000 of them are entitled to sheltered living. 5,000 are staying long-term in a psychiatric hospital.⁵

People don't get better by living in a psychiatric hospital. Human autonomy is lost in an institution. The living conditions within most sheltered living forms are poor. Rooms are small, common areas worn out. There is a lot of drug use and insecurity. Not really a safe and sheltered living. This doesn't make anyone better.

And yet care is designed for the most vulnerable people.

Should everyone then live completely on their own? Should they all have an autonomous existence in society? It's the dream of many policymakers, as if issues are resolved by letting people be as autonomous as possible. This leads to loneliness and social isolation, while every individual actually needs social contact.

Based on these considerations, forms of housing have been developed by Zeeuwse Gronden that offer the best of both worlds: social structure and a home of one's own. The emphasis on social structure has to do with our origins. Family is at the base of Zeeuwse Gronden. At the same time people need a place to be alone, their own home: this is also a universal part of happiness.

We are from Zeeland. In Zeeland, land is a concept. The sea has shaped the land by leaving fine layers of clay, day after day. It is the most fertile land in the world. Zeeuwse Gronden. Our aim is to facilitate a safe and nourishing environment to live a life of their own.

A residential complex at Zeeuwse Gronden usually consists of twelve apartments within a larger whole. Every person has his own living room, bedroom, bathroom, kitchen and front door. But living alone is embedded within a social structure. There is a common living room and a large garden, and everyone can dine together every day, if they want to.

25,000 very vulnerable people in The Netherlands are looking for a place where they can live a safe and social life. In Zeeland this comes to 500 people. For the moment 150 of them are living with Zeeuwse Gronden, located all over Zeeland. We believe that every person who is entitled to sheltered living, should have the opportunity to such a form of living. Every township in The Netherlands should have access to small-scale, safe, social forms of living - at the centre of society.

Not everyone can or wants to live at Zeeuwse Gronden. There are clear rules. Illegal drug use is not permitted; there is 'zero tolerance' in that area. We ensure to see, meet and talk to residents at least once every day. This is not only a wish, but also a rule. It is healthy and important for everyone to speak to another person at least once a day. This is a medicine for the entire society.

Social life is therefore of great importance. If there is no longer contact with your family, we will do everything to restore this contact. We believe that you, as an individual, are part of your family. Social life among residents is important as well. We cannot force this to happen, but we can promote it. The common living room and the garden play a major role in this. We see residents recover through social contact.

We provide what is necessary for your health. We don't just offer this, we make sure that it is used. We don't just stand on the side-lines, watching while you sink away into depression or psychosis. We fight to prevent this, to get you back into the world - even if you might not care less at that moment.

Finally, we are convinced that activities, meaningful activities, make an enormous contribution to your own happiness and to the happiness of others. We encourage all people to use their day in a meaningful way. Zeeuwse Gronden offers a large number of daytime activities. Clients are running shops and restaurants in the centre of society.

The largest project is about horses. These horses are used very successfully in equine therapy. We keep a large herd of horses on a farm in a 17th century polder. There, we provide care, not only to people with psychiatric problems but also to a group of children between 12 and 18, who no longer dare to go to school.

This equine therapy project closes the circle. Western society is not that healthy for very vulnerable citizens. Along with family, employees and clients, we develop safe places for living and working, where everyone feels accepted. The special feature is that these places are also appealing to other vulnerable groups, such as children who are struggling at school. They are received with open arms on our farm. It is quite special that psychiatry returns the concept of hospitality back to society. In the end it gives young people the courage to return to school.

Zeeuwse Gronden is the pioneering example for the new sheltered living in The Netherlands. At various places outside of Zeeland (including Rotterdam), family is trying hard to bring Zeeuwse Gronden to their own township. Our ultimate goal is getting regular mental health care moving. For many years it has been said that small-scale, specialist care is not possible for the most vulnerable group. We are the living proof that it is.

Literature

¹ It is almost impossible to provide an overview of the literature on happiness. One classic is the thesis of the Rotterdam Professor Ruut Veenhoven (1984) *Conditions of happiness*.

Another classical work which coincides with the rise of positive psychology is by Martin Seligman (1990), *Learned optimism*. The international.

The how of happiness (2007) by Sonja Lyubomirsky and *Happier* by Tal Ben-Shahar (2007) are also beautiful, educational books.

² - WHO (1973) *The international pilot study of schizophrenia*. Geneva.

- WHO (1979) *Schizophrenia. An international follow-up study*. Chichester: John Wiley

- Jablensky, A., Sartorius, N., Ernberg, G., Anker, M., Korten, A., Cooper, J.E., Day, R., Bertelsen, A. (1992) Schizophrenia: manifestations, incidence and course in different cultures. A World Health Organization Ten Country Study. *Psychological Medicine*, Monograph Supplement 20.

- Hopper, K. & Wanderling, J. (2000) Revisiting the Developed versus Developing Country Distinction in Course and Outcome in Schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 26 (4), 835-846.

The WHO studies on the course of schizophrenia present us with a special paradox. Another constituent fact (Veenhoven, 1984) is that people in the Western world are the happiest. That certainly has to do with prosperity, but also with the social-democratic system (to use an almost old-fashioned term). (Political) freedom is appreciated, just as a certain degree of care from the government. The five happiest countries, according to the *World Happiness Report 2019*, are: 1) Finland, 2) Norway, 3) Denmark, 4) Iceland and 5) the Netherlands.

The Scandinavian countries have been at the top for years. Denmark is one of the countries that fares the worst in terms of schizophrenia. In a society where 'normal' people feel at their best, the circumstances are less favourable for people with a serious psychiatric disorder.

³Dumont, L. (1986) *Essays on Individualism: modern ideology in anthropological perspective*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

An example of the tension between the call for an original, autonomous life and a normative, prescribed existence that seems to affect man's happiness is marriage, or the presence of a permanent partner. 'A bond with a spouse is in fact one of the most essential conditions of happiness in modern western society (Veenhoven, 1984). The majority of people diagnosed with a serious psychiatric disorder have no permanent partner.

⁴Corin, E.E. (1990) Facts and meaning in psychiatry. An anthropological approach to the lifeworld of schizophrenics. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 14, 153 – 188.

⁵ For these figures and the original source references, see:
Jan van Blarikom (2018) *Het nieuwe Beschermd Wonen*.

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