

# Does the experience of former clients contribute to an effective rehabilitation?

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## Goal

Visio intends to make more and better use of the power of the former client ("expert") in its services, in addition to the professional staff, by using their experience in living with a visual impairment.

The small-scale pilots took place within the team adult care of Visio Rehabilitation & Advice in Breda and Den Haag and focussed on two roles:

1. Buddy; a representative of Visio that will share her/his expertise to support clients (before and) during the rehabilitation process.
2. Ambassador; a representative of Visio, that will share her/his expertise for promotional purposes.



**"I have the idea that I can help people because of my own positivity. You can have so much! You **have** an impairment, you **are not** your impairment."**

A competency profile has been prepared for both functions. After recruitment 15 people were selected. They followed a training, consisting of a base module, a buddy module and an ambassador module. This training and the course book are evaluated and adjusted, with specific attention for empowering the buddy's and ambassadors.

During the pilot, the experts are guided by a coach through individual consultations and they join peer review meetings. The coaches (employees of Visio) followed a training by an external party to be well prepared for these tasks.

**"I let them express themselves, I have no judgement and listen."**

A student has measured the effects for both clients, the organisation and the experts themselves through an evaluative research focused on the role of a buddy.

## The most important results

The buddy's form an example for clients, which leads to empowerment. The contact is filled in by each couple and there is a lot of recognition between the clients and the buddy's. This is of added value for the clients because they experience that

they are not the only ones who struggle with (the consequences of) a visual impairment. There are various topics, such as the rehabilitation, the possibilities at Royal Dutch Visio, the meaning of the daily life limitation, acceptance and social aspects.

Working as a buddy provides several benefits, such as meaningful occupation during the day, energy, feeling valuable, getting to know boundaries and conversation techniques.

All clients in both regions unanimously advise other clients to talk to a buddy. All buddy's agree that the pilot contributes to their participation in society and all of them would apply again.

**"I can tell my son that I have volunteer work. Finally, I have a satisfied feeling at the end of the day. Helping people is now my life motto. Even at parties I like to have a reply to what I do for work. I'm proud of what I do and I get appreciation in return."**

The research has shown that Visio professionals find that the pilot is complementary to Visio's services. They also believe that the pilot should be expanded to all locations of Visio. Most respondents do not expect the professionals to be replaced by the buddy's and ambassadors, but they will take over certain tasks.

A policy document will be developed, which will outline a clear longer term framework for structural use of buddy's and ambassadors in all facets of the Visio services.

**"I feel valuable if I can give company to another person, let someone smile. Or if I can be compassionate to someone."**



## Conclusion

The use of experts (former clients) as buddy or ambassador has a strong added value for clients and experts and potentially for Visio professionals. With this knowledge, Visio has laid the foundation for implementing the process sustainably and possibly expanding to other locations. However, there are certain improvement points, for example in matching clients, the preconditions for pilot participation and the publicity of the pilot.