

Good afternoon everyone. My apologies for my English, it's not great and I had to look up quite a few words translating my speech.

Let me first introduce myself. My name is Gisele Vranckx, I'm from the Netherlands. Before I became a professional experience expert I started my own online group, discussing all kinds of problems for instance depression and traumatic experiences.

The last five years I've been working with the FACT team in Zaandam as an experience expert. FACT stands for Flexible Assertive Community Treatment. This is a mobile team, meaning clients will either come to us or we will go their homes. We also work with groups like the WRAP (Wellnes Recovery Action Plan) and recovery-groups (like MiiND).

I also work as a peer worker within a specialized group for people with personality disorders. I have an advising role to other teams.

In November 2013 I was asked to host the new MiiND project as a pilot.

MiiND is an online community. Every participant gets a tablet they can chat with through text messages and live video. The MiiND community is suitable for those who want to work with peers online.

Possible aspects clients could work on using MiiND are:

- Breaking isolation
- Meeting peers
- Exchanging experiences with peers
- Enhance social skills
- Gaining new experiences
- Recovering together with fellow peers

Up to two care professionals, being nurses, social workers, experience experts support the local MiiND community.

Usually these professionals are members of the FACT team, that guides the clients in their recovery process and maintain the contacts.

Essential to guiding the MiiND community is the basic attitude of “minimal guidance”. This promotes structure, empowerment and reciprocity. Minimal guidance means the care professional provides structure, continuity and a sense of security. The care professional instead of controlling, invites the client to go online and stimulates to get involved.

There are two development phases within the MiiND community:

Phase one: central theme is getting the client used to the structure of the MiiND community, getting to know each other, bonding, recognition and a sense of security. Stimulate reciprocity, empowerment and “minimal guidance” is the baseline for the care professional.

Phase two: personal growth

When the MiiND community gets strong enough in trust and connectivity the time is right for the second phase. The environment is now secure enough for the client to learn social skills and become self insightful. Among these new skills is their growing ability to receive support and give support to others within the community. Confronting their own tensions they learn to redefine their ideas. Clients learn to heal themselves and deal with their emotions.

Why do I feel this project is so interesting?

From my personal experience I know how lonely people can become. Social media is the norm in today’s society and the MiiND project plays into that aspect, helping clients to meet each other in a different way.

At first we had a meeting with all the selected clients and project leaders of the MiiND project.

Everybody was very enthusiastic. I already treated a few of the clients, making it easy for me to contact them. Some others were referred to me by other care professionals.

We started out with ten clients and myself being the host.

1. The purpose of the first meeting was to find out the individual needs of the clients. Some nice ideas were put forward like a coffee club, a cooking club and a writing club. Recovery themes were discussed as well.
2. The second meeting we handed out the tablet. An exciting moment for everybody, because the project now officially started.

There were some problems at the start with clients who did not have a WIFI connection, which we tried to solve.

I got four hours per week to host MiiND.

In practice it turned out to be much more, mostly to give instructions on how to use the tablet and give more of a sense of security for the clients. Of course I myself had to get used to the project.

Getting started as the host of MiiND.

Right from the beginning I spent a lot of time on the project. Feeling responsible and excited.

One client connected to online video and saw me coming online. At first he was shocked. It was completely new to him to see the person he was calling and had to get used to it. The online video of MiiND is like Skype, but you don't just see some ones face but the entire person. This is because of the special lens mounted on the tablet. Suddenly a stranger entered the room he never shared with anyone else. We were taking a look into each others private living space.

The client was living at a assisted living facility and only let in caretakers up to that point in time. He lived an isolated life, was easily scared and very suspicious.

For example when MiiND had a software update, this client got very confused.

I had to be very creative in reassuring him, gaining his trust involving him in the conversation. I had to approach him in a flexible and empathic manner.

Empathy and flexibility are two skills a host should have. I discovered that these are just two of many skills to help individual clients with different needs and attitudes, each in their own unique way.

To show you what these skills are, I will give you some examples.

The skills I discovered are:

- *Empathy*
- *Flexible*
- *Sincere interest*
- *Social skills and using this for reflection/ learning moment*
- *respect the boundaries, respect your own and boundaries of the client*
- *Appeal to behavior and attitude, making conversation*
- *Anticipate the clients need, but not lose sight of the group*
- *Professional approach*
- *Individually talks with the clients who find it difficult to get online*
- *Stimulate and motivate the clients*
- *Making difficult situations easier to handle*
- *Sense of humor*
- *Creative thinking*
- *Openness*
- *Staying close to yourself*
- *The ability to not the give up easily*
- *Be patient*

Because many clients have their own activities during the day but were lonely in the evening, I often went online during those hours. This flexible approach was an advantage. On the other hand I had my work at the FACT team during the day and couldn't get enough rest.

This project was a pilot. There was no comparison and my enthusiasm is both a quality and my pitfall. I had no one to reflect on the project.

On the fifth of November 2015 we started a new community and I was working together with a case manager. So I didn't have to work on it alone anymore.

Guarding my boundaries is a must. At first I got too involved in the project.

Ensuring the boundaries of others is also an essential skill. Example: a client stopped drinking and another client liked to drink a beer in his livingroom while online. I negotiated the matter to come to a compromise among the clients. Empathy can be used to deal with these matters.

Another example was a client who got so very comfortable using the tablet, he left it on all day. At one point parading around in his underwear I felt I had to step in. I had to bring that to him in a casual way without breaking trust.

In the beginning you had to dig deep with the clients to get them really interested. Getting their motivation from discovering their qualities, interests and what they liked to discuss themselves.

Online video became a place where clients met in a relaxed setting, could talk with each other while enjoying a cup of coffee. Just like they would do under normal circumstances in their own livingroom with friends. It became an environment where clients could have a good laugh with each other.

Aditonal I created a writers workshop to encourage creative thinking, another social skill. I gave the clients a subject and they were free to write anything they wanted on that theme. They were also free to tell their story instead of writing it down. Some clients liked writing about a specific subject. Others preferred discussing the subject. Once a week we got together for the writers workshop.

The subjects were always recovery related, like medication, qualities & pitfalls, dreams & wishes. The subject matter never pointed towards illness but always towards health and recovery.

Showing empathy plays a very important role. One of the clients was fearful using online video. She had a valid reason to be. I started out chatting with her individually. This support worked well in her phase of recovery. Often we ended online sessions with something fun, just to finish in a positive way. We exchanged music, creating a relaxed mood. The client appreciated this a lot. At some point in time she joined the group online.

Because some of the clients were socially isolated, I needed to be an example to them; that I would be dependable or a sign of hope to them. I'm making this point because with the online video you are very exposed. In a way the online video is more intense than a regular group meeting or a one on one conversation.

Staying positive helped to create a relaxed atmosphere, even when clients were annoyed when, for instance, others did not get online.

Behind the scenes, I was often busy motivating the clients and investigating why some of them didn't go online.

Indurance was needed to keep stimulating and motivating clients. One client took over two months to get online the first time. At first he didn't have WIFI and when he did he was scared to come online. Fear of the unknown and his isolation remained an issue and I had to continue motivating this client. When he did face his fears the contact was a very pleasant relief.

Discovering and describing the qualities of the clients was very important in the process. Important for self esteem and engaging in the subject matter.

One client quit because he claimed not to have time for it and never got online.

A sincere interest in what moves the client is another important aspect.

One client told me he used to take lots of pictures in the past, but not anymore. He had published them on the web, but we couldn't look at them through MiiND. In the end I used my Ipad as a in between, showing that online and discussing the pictures with the client. A very fascinating conversation where the client could tell me about his passion. A few months later he picked up on photography again.

I'm very honoured I got to work on this project. Mostly because of the added value to the recovery process of the clients.

This pilot lasted a half a year.

November 2015 a new MiiND project started with sixteen participants, this time together with a colleague to support me.

During the pilot the clients had various backgrounds of problems. What stood out the first time is that clients with a personality disorder used the MiiND tablet more often. They experienced more support from clients with the same kind of problems. They recognized themselves in others.

The second time we ran the MiiND project our targetgroup was clients with a psychotic background. In practice this showed to be more difficult since the clients were suspicious and fearful of showing initiative to go online. They had more trouble getting in touch and preferred to take a back seat.

At a certain point in time the clients and I were asked to make an instruction video.

Curiously when clients made the first instruction video together with the project manager, the final result didn't please them. They felt they weren't portrayed correctly and the video itself was of poor quality. So together they made a remake. Making this new video was a lot of fun. It gave a profound sense of community and because of that bond you really got the feeling that the MiiND project was their project.

Interview Vincent Vonk:

My name is Vincent Vonk. I am 42 and want to share something about MiiND.

How did you learn about MiiND ?

V: I was part of a recovery-group and was asked to participate with MiiND.

Why did you join the MiiND group ?

V: I was curious about the project and wanted to meet new people and was eager to participate. I liked the idea of talking about various subject with peers.

How did the first meeting go ?

V: It was exciting since I didn't know any of the people. It was a large group, half of them were women.

What was your experience going online the first time ?

V: It was funny seeing everybody on the screen. You are in each others living space. You're having a private look where everybody lives. I had trimmed my Christmas tree. Everybody could see it and it created a comfortable atmosphere.

What did you think was special about the MiiND project ?

V: I got close with one of the other participants becoming good friends. We decided to meet outside of the MiiND project, went to the movies together and out for dinner. Our common interest in Rock music created a bond between us.

What did you like most about MiiND ?

V: We made a promotional video together, which was fun to do. Also I liked being a buddy for others. I was online daily and at some point grew into of the regular contact. I almost adopted the roll of host, moderating other participants.

Is there anything you would like to add ?

V: The MiiND project is a big plus for people who live in social isolation. For me personally I gained some friends, one in particular.

At the end this project took a whole year.

We are going to start a new MiiND community in September this year with more hosts and smaller groups. This means more support and easier for clients to go online.

Last time we developed a few different card games to open up conversations between client and hosts. For instance the "small talk" cards, with cards that read: "cat or dog?" or "coffee or tea?".

Another game, which we are going to try right now, was "More Detail"

Here I have one card from the game. And I would like to ask the audience to answer the question.

What do you like about yourself?

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Are there any questions?

Gisele Vranckx