

Interview with the directors

Door: Peter Keijsers

I thought it would be a good idea to sit down with the board members of the Groen Licht foundation. The driving force behind Groen Licht is Antoinette Bastiaans, and since March together with her partner in crime Bart Kuntzelaers. When I step into the office in Venlo-Zuid, they are both hard at work. Calls continue to flow in, the laptop and computer are in full use and there is a constant consultation. At the table at the door two trainees are also doing their job. I take place at the desk diagonally opposite Antoinette, while Antoinette and Bart finish their work I drink my cup of coffee that I have received. After this I lightly start the interview.



As I start each interview, I start this interview as well: first introduce yourself.

Antoinette: I am Antoinette Bastiaans and I am the general director at Groen Licht.

Bart: My name is Bart Kuntzelaers. I support Antoinette on the administrative level. Until

the beginning of this year Antoinette kept the whole foundation running on her own, eventually that is too much for one person to handle.

Antoinette: Of course I did not do it all alone. The foundation has so many competent and involved volunteers who commit themselves to the foundation unpaid.

Bart: Any foundation depends on a subsidy provider, and if one is not careful, that is really getting into the head. But one can do something about that, for example by diverging. We are now working to ensure that other sources of income are added so that subsidies become part of the total picture. That is one of the ways to ensure that the foundation becomes stronger and can continue in 2025, for example.

The foundation has partners in civil society, with whom we cooperate. One of those partners is, of course, the city, but also, for example, Taalhuis (Language House) in which a number of partners work together - both at the executive level and at the strategic level. The latter is now taking shape. At the moment we do not (yet) have formal education, but non-formal education. For example, we are not responsible for general health care, that is the GGD (Municipal Health Service). That is one of the partners that collaborates with other organizations in the Taalhuis. As a result, one reaches everyone one would like to reach as being Groen Licht, provided that this cooperation works well of course. I myself have done a lot of things in the last six months to get this done.

About that Taalhuis, I read on Omroep Venlo that it would be initiated by the city library. That is not correct?

Bart: Taalhuis Venlo is an independent partnership of chain partners. It does not

reside in any overarching organization, except that each participating organization has its own responsibility over its own contribution. What we, the organizations, make of that is up to ourselves.

What is your personal motivation?

Antoinette: Everyone is entitled to their own place in society. If I can help, whether it is about language, social support, or that people can function better again, I will not stop doing that. That makes me happy. Everyone can participate, without thinking in boxes, without sticking post-its, everybody deserves a chance.

Bart: I have put my life at the service of fellow human beings, based on the firm belief that everyone has the right to fully develop themselves. With my contribution to Groen Licht, I hope to be able to lend a hand. Everyone has the ability to do everything, but sometimes that skill is overshadowed by certain events; something that has proven to be difficult, people who have experienced a lot of setbacks, people who were born here and who did not participate well in primary school, or from our language demanders that people had to take a huge and ordealing journey. 'It starts with language' is not just a statement; it truly does start with language. Groen Licht also provides support for people in this area. Not only in the language field, but also for example in the field of participation. I believe that we can help people on their way, support them so that they can take steps forward themselves. Of course, we are not responsible for making people happy, but I think, if we can help people take the right steps, support them, that it works.

Guidance seems to be the key word here.

Bart: That goes without saying. We do not show how it should be done, but most certainly helping them in the right direction. Assuming everyone has the potential to do anything, is in itself a positive basic attitude. It is very encouraging, supportive. So not patronizing or muting, we do not do that.

Everyone joins in...

Bart: Everyone *can* do this, but sometimes one has to be reminded. But low educated does not necessarily mean illiterate.

But one often has to do with the other, right?

Antoinette: Those people have mostly stopped going to school until primary school, after that no more. By individually looking at what someone needs, we can offer the right help so that these people can move on. That can be through language lessons, training, guidance, you name it.

Bart: We can also offer an internship, or jointly see which further training someone has to choose on the way to a paid job. We as Groen Licht have a functioning database in which we can keep track of the steps someone has to take at an individual level. But we strive for the cooperating partners to be included in this so that things do not happen twice, or that we have to zoom in on a certain aspect that someone still needs in order to be able to continue. That is a unique concept that does not exist anywhere else.

How did it start?

Antoinette: in August 2012, I started a Groen Licht project at the self-management

center (Zelfregiecentrum). In 2014 the project was transferred into a foundation.

Why the name Groen Licht?

Antoinette: The name says it all: if you have green light, you can continue. Green is the color of hope. And I want to offer that hope to the people who come here.

What does the overall structure of Groen Licht look like?

Antoinette & Bart: That is all in the annual report. The information about the foundation can all be found on the website.

Antoinette: Well, we have had 400 trajects. That is both Groen Licht itself and Taalcoaches as a daughter project.

Bart: Do not forget that we have 120 volunteers who are all involved in this.

Then we are not only talking about Venlo, but also Roermond, for example.

Antoinette: In Roermond we are starting again. Until recently, Karin had taht location under her care, but after she passed away it became too much for me to manage both Venlo and Roermond, and so we put it on hold. But now we are starting it again. So, by now we are throughout North and Central Limburg. In the municipality of Venlo we are in Blerick, Tegelen, Belfeld and Venlo. And then we still have the Taalcafé (Language café). In total there are seven locations in the municipality of Venlo.

Last year Groen Licht received the Red Ribbon, an initiative of a political party. How did you experience this?

Antoinette: I do not like to be in the spotlight. Let others to stand there, I prefer to stay behind the scenes to make sure that everything is well arranged. The work I do is for the people, not for the attention.

Then you immediately know why you are doing this.

Antoinette: Of course, but I did not do it all by myself. I may have taken the reigns for the bigger part, but all those volunteers have certainly contributed to the success. I have a lot of qualified people around me, and that makes a huge difference.

Bart: As a driving force one does a lot of work that is not immediately visible to others. I know for a fact that Antoinette greatly appreciated that 'her' foundation received the recognition it deserves.

How do you see Groen Licht having its place in a changing society? The Netherlands is becoming more multicultural. People will always have the need to seek a safe haven for refuge.

Antoinette: We are going with the flow. Minorities will always be there. And not necessarily minorities, but people who need a bit of support with the Dutch language. If one does not have enough control over it, one will soon end up in a situation of poverty, or any situation of disadvantage...

Bart: It starts with language. 1) Low literacy, 2) participation, 3) debt counseling and poverty reduction. These are the three pillars along which Groen Licht moves.

We have already briefly mentioned a number of activities. What activities does Groen Licht have in addition to the language offer?

Antoinette: We have the Language Café, among other things. This is mainly about the pronunciation of the Dutch language, speaking with each other. There are people from many different cultures here. Together they go into conversation with each other. Along the way, there are also friendships growing here, across all cultures.

And if one of the language demanders comes up with the idea, for example, to organize a workshop about making your own clothing?

Antoinette: Yes, that is a good example. In that case we will see if we can offer any kind of support.

Final question: where do you see Groen Licht in five years?

Bart: Now, that is a nice question. Of course, we do not know where we are in five years, but if you please (looks at Antoinette), I would say: in five years in the whole of Limburg, and in ten years in the whole of the Netherlands.

Antoinette: I totally agree with that. And now we have to get back on the road, because duty is calling again.

Bart: That is the fate of a manager: appointments, everywhere and always.