

## LANGUAGE LESSONS IN TEGELEN

By: Peter Keijsers

Now that Stichting Groen Licht has been operational in Venlo and Blerick for a while, we also come to Tegelen. Even more, meanwhile the first groups in the district “up the mountain” have already started. Just steps away from the local supermarket at the Glazenapplein, we have found a suitable location in the former elementary school De Cocon, situated at the Galgevenstraat 250. Now that these first groups have started, I decided to go and take a look. I immediately come across an old acquaintance: Sylvie Derksen.

I have known Sylvie for more than twenty years, from the time that I was still actively playing basketball. Striking that I meet her here at the school. Sylvie is a quiet woman. Even when she speaks, she exudes peace and tranquility. By her appearance one would think that they have to speak Dutch or English to her, but that is far from the truth. She masters the Venlo dialect like no other, which makes it more pleasant for me to talk to her. When she came to Venlo, everyone spoke dialect, and that is how she learned it. Sylvie is one of the Dutch teachers at Groen Licht. Together with two others she teaches class in Tegelen. Her class has the A1 level. As a baby, she had come to the Netherlands from Congo. After she finished grade school she studied journalism and followed an education to become a Dutch teacher. At first Sylvie had joined Taalcoaches by reacting to an advert in a local paper. Via Taalcoaches she eventually ended up at Groen Licht. The Taalcoaches coordinator had put her in contact with Antoinette Bastiaans. With Taalcoaches the emphasis was mostly on covering problems with the Dutch language,

while she now prefers language teaching itself.

She enjoys teaching; the location is good, and the students are fun to work with, very eager to learn. She notices that her students know more of the Dutch language than they realize themselves. However, she regularly has to switch between Dutch and English to be able to explain certain things to her students. Every week she gives them two Dutch sentences to explain in their own words, using their knowledge of Dutch they already cover. Repetition of the already learning material is very important, she says. With one of her students, however, she regularly works with a Dutch-Polish dictionary. By now, she has a group of four students, but the maximum for decent teaching class-wise is a group of ten. Sylvie not only teaches Dutch language, but also gives background information about the Dutch culture. She tells them about typical events like Carnaval (Shrove Tuesday), and she finds it important that her students know

more about Dutch history and politics. Her students understand all of this quite well, especially when she makes connections to other cultures.

Now it is almost the time of Carnaval, and in the following week there are no classes. That too is Venlo. A lot of people in Venlo will celebrate three days from Sunday to Shrove Tuesday, and many of our students will at least notice something from the festivities. It does not matter if they join the celebrations or not. It is part of our culture in the south of the Netherlands, and that too is what Sylvie talks about in her classes. Where one calls it Ramadan, and another carnaval, the people from Venlo call it Vastelaovend. No matter if you were born in Congo, Colombia, China, Morocco, Amsterdam or Venlo, everyone can join. From my place behind the computer I wish everyone *Vastelaovend same, en neet te zaat. Alaaf!*

