

# ALL ABOUT US

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## HARRIE HERFS: ‘AMSTERDAM SEEMS READY FOR 24 HOURS SHELTER’

Amsterdam, 28 April 2017  
By W.H.M.G.

**‘I think 24-hours shelter in Amsterdam is possible. I personally think it is necessary and I am hopeful the City Council thinks so too by now and is ready to make a start with it. Bed, Bath and Bread is just not enough to survive. People need help, assistance, guidance to find a route to the future.’**

Harrie Herfs speaks openly during a 45 minute meeting with reporters of the World House Media Group (WHMG) on Monday 24 April. He is the Care-coordinator of several departments of HVO Querido, among which the BBB night shelters at Walborg and Schuithuisstraat.

Both BBB’s –Walborg and Schuithuisstraat- will have to move elsewhere early 2018 as the City’s rental contracts expire in January and February next year. ‘There is no plan yet for new locations. I personally don’t think 24-hours shelter necessarily needs to be offered on one location. It may well be possible to have night shelter between 16.00 p.m. -9.00 a.m. on several locations and day shelter from 9.00 a.m. -16.00 p.m. elsewhere. But the day shelter location must offer individual support so people can enter new tracks which may lead to permanent stay in The Netherlands or maybe return to their home countries. But it should also offer courses and workshops and help people find jobs.’ Says Harrie Herfs.

### MORE HEALTH PROBLEMS

‘Many people who enter BBB feel relieved at first, but after a while, when nothing changes concerning their situation, we witness them getting depressed, losing their hopes and energy, getting more health problems than they had before. This is a bad thing. People need to be able to work towards some future.’

At the very start of the interview Harrie Herfs explains that the future of BBB does not only depend on the municipalities of Dutch cities, like Amsterdam, Rotterdam or Groningen. ‘In November last year the Central government in The Hague decided to stop the money to help Dutch cities to shelter undocumented people.

‘The Central Government now doesn’t agree with the way the cities deal with it. For that reason the City of Amsterdam had to cut short on the BBB-budget of 2017. Much of what will be possible next year depends on what our new government will decide concerning the treatment of rejected asylum seekers and other undocumented people staying in The Netherlands.’

### NO MORE OV-CARD

‘The weekly OV-card that people who stay in the BBB’s have received so far, costs 260,000 a year. This is the reason the City council decided to stop it. They can no longer afford it after the Central Government stopped its subsidy. It’s when my organisation, HVO Querido, said: okay, we’ll think of some alternative and came up with the bicycle plan.’

Harrie thinks there are good and bad sides to the plan: ‘The good thing of course is, that it saves 200,000 as the bicycle-plan costs 60,000. We can afford to distribute 70-90 bicycles among our clients from the first of May. But surely, there are risks too and I am aware that not all people feel safe on a bike or know to behave in traffic. They are afraid of accidents. This is why we offer cycling lessons to people who don’t know how to cycle or who feel insecure about it. We will also offer traffic education to everybody.’

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## BICYCLE-STRESS



Bicycles at Walborg waiting to be used

Harrie admits that many people feel stressed now the OV-card will stop and they are supposed to cycle in future. 'Many people went to their doctors and several doctors wrote statements saying their patients are not able to cycle. We will study these statements of course.'

Still, he explains, last year HVO ran a 'pilot project' with 20 bicycles and it was successful. 'People learned quickly. The only thing they didn't want was to hand-in their OV-cards for a bicycle. But now they will have to. There is just no more money to give them the cards.'

'If people will not make use of the bikes and the plan will fail, it will be up to Anne Klerks of the City of Amsterdam to think up another plan,' says Harrie. 'As really, it is the City Council's responsibility. They are the ones who decided to stop the OV-card. All HVO did was think of a way to not force you all to go by foot all the time.'

In the meantime it's not sure if the people in Walborg can yet make use of bicycles at May first as there is not enough space to park bikes at Walborg. 'They may still get an OV-card next week,' says Harrie. 'At Schuithuisstraat the parking is no problem, so people there can get their bikes on Monday.'

'We will just have to see how all works out,' is how he finishes the interview.

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