

BREAKING THE **STIGMA** ON PSYCHICAL PROBLEMS BY BICYCLING TOGETHER

When someone breaks their arm or a leg, there is no secrecy about it. But with depressions, burn-outs, psychosis or a disease like anorexia, it's very different. In the Netherlands, child psychiatrist Cecil Prins-Aardema has started a campaign to break the stigma's that surround psychical problems.

BY FRANS OOSTERWIJK

When her husband became seriously depressed in 2017, Cecil Prins-Aardema, psychiatrist and manager at the Dutch Mental Health Service (GGZ) in the province of Drenthe, also had trouble being open about

it. It felt as if she had failed. Inspired by the American child psychiatrist Andrés Martin, Director of the Yale Child Study Center, she founded the international campaign *Break the Stigma* one year later.



Cecil Prins-Aardema (red dress) with her GGZ-cycling group promoting the campaign.

PHOTO VOLANDA WISSEK

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Cecil Prins-Aardema

Prins-Aardema: “Because I experienced the impact of depression up close, I became more aware of the fact that there is an enormous difference between how people respond to serious physical injury and to psychological illness. People prefer to stay clear of those with psychological problems. We want to break that stigma. For the benefit of the patients themselves, but also for the rest of the family, because they too, are often treated differently due to the psychological problems of someone in their family.”

NOT ALONE

The campaign aims to make psychological illness open for discussion and let these people and families know that they are not alone. Prins-Aardema: “Psychical disorders are very common. Yet, people often feel as though they are the only ones that have to go through it. We want to communicate that they do not need to feel guilty or ashamed. Being open about psychological problems and providing support to their families are important conditions for the right treatment.”



To create awareness for the campaign among a large audience, Prins-Aardema and GGZ Drenthe chose to hold a bicycling tour as a ‘medium’. Prins-Aardema: “Drenthe is the number one cycling province in Holland thanks to its serene landscape. The campaign kicked off in Assen, the capital of Drenthe, during a bicycling event last summer. In the weeks that followed, the campaign was also linked to other regular cycling events throughout the Netherlands.”

By now, bicycling groups have been formed all over the Netherlands with patients and families who come together on bicycling events found on the local or regional calendar. Health care institutions and practitioners have also learned of the campaign and are increasingly stimulating their

patients and families to participate. Prins-Aardema: “Bicycling as a means of exercise already has a healing effect. But it’s also a way to bring people together, so patients and families feel no longer isolated.”

SUPPORT FROM UCI

In July, Cecil Prins-Aardema and Andrés Martin created awareness for the campaign at the world congress of the international association of child psychiatrists in Prague by sharing her vision with colleagues.

Break the Stigma was given another boost with the support of the UCI international cycling federation through its own Cycling for All platform. This platform stimulates bicycling and the participation in bicycling events around the world.

“Thanks to their messages on social media, *Break the Stigma* now also is known in less traditional bicycling countries as Uganda and Singapore”, Prins-Aardema says. “The project has reached far beyond anything I could have dreamt of when I started it with my colleagues at the GGZ in Drenthe.” ★

IN NOVEMBER THE (DIGITAL) BULLETIN OF THE WORLD ASSOCIATION OF CHILD AND YOUTH PSYCHIATRISTS (IACAPAP) PUBLISHED THE ‘BREAK THE STIGMA FOR FAMILIES’ ARTICLE BY CECIL PRINS-AARDEMA. SEE: [HTTP://IACAPAP.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/BULLETIN-NOVEMBER-2018.PDF](http://iacapap.org/wp-content/uploads/bulletin-november-2018.pdf).