

# NEWSLETTER

First edition 2017 – A report from Aachen, Germany



We publish this newsletter on a regular basis to inform about the "START NOW" skills-training and the accompanying research project. The structure of this newsletter is as follows: 1. Current news, 2. Introduction of the Research Center Aachen, 3. Presentation of the "Agnesheim Stolberg" - one of our cooperating youth welfare institutions.

## "START NOW" News

Mid of October 2016, a „START NOW“ meeting took place at the research center in Aachen. The project leader Prof. Dr. Christina Stadler (University of Basel) and the primarily responsible Ph. D. students from Basel, Frankfurt, Amsterdam and Aachen. attended the meeting. Main points on the agenda included, discussing the feedback from the cooperating youth welfare institutions regarding their experiences with the "START NOW" skills-training. Furthermore, improvement suggestions were discussed to adapt the "START NOW" manual and workbook according to the needs of the participants and welfare institutions. An updated version of the manual with new illustrations was presented and it is in use since then.

From the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of February the 4<sup>th</sup> FemNAT-CD General Assembly Meeting will take place in Budapest, Hungary. All involved researchers from all over Europe will gather together to discuss the current state of research, present up-to-date data and plan the last year of FemNAT-CD data assessment.

So far, seven groups of girls completed the "START NOW" training. Additionally, seven groups were recruited and randomized into the control group (Treatment As Usual). The participants in the control groups will receive the "START NOW" group training at a later time. At the moment, the project is supported by 17 youth welfare institutions around Europe (Netherlands 1, Switzerland 6 and Germany 10 (5/Aachen, 5/Frankfurt a.M.)). In total, 74 girls have taken part in the project so far.

## Current news from Aachen

Since December 2016, there are three new cooperating youth welfare institutions in Aachen, which we hereby want to warmly welcome in the "START NOW" family! In one youth welfare institution, the "House St. Josef", participants for "START NOW" have already been recruited and the first assessment is currently being planned.

**The Aachen "START NOW" team**



Left: The University Hospital, RWTH Aachen, Germany; Top right: Prof. Herpertz-Dahlmann, Director of the Department of Psychiatry, Psychosomatics and Psychotherapy of Childhood and Adolescence; Bottom right: Prof. Kerstin Konrad, Head of the Department of Clinical Neuropsychology of Childhood and Adolescence.

The Department of Psychiatry, Psychosomatics and Psychotherapy of Childhood and Adolescence (KJP) of the University Hospital RWTH Aachen treats and supports children, young people and their families from the greater Aachen region and the neighboring German-speaking communities in Belgium. The clinic consists of two day clinics, one outpatient clinic, three fully-equipped wards and several places at a special locked-ward. The teaching and research team "Clinical Neuropsychology" forms part of the KJP and has its own neuropsychological outpatient clinic. In the KJP Aachen, every year approximately 600 up to 700 patients with various forms of behavioral and aggressive behavioral problems are treated. The KJP participates in several national and international research consortia, which examine upon other things the neuropsychological, neurobiological and genetic mechanisms of various childhood and juvenile psychiatric disorders. Fundamental research as well as clinical therapy research is being conducted.

Since 2013, the KJP Aachen together with 17 other research facilities from all over Europe forms part of the FemNAT-CD consortia. The EU FemNAT-CD project "Neurobiology and Therapy for Girls with Conduct Disorders - The Central Role of Emotional Regulation" is funded by the European Union.

The FemNAT-CD team is supported by Prof. Dr. med. Beate Herpertz-Dahlmann and Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Kerstin Konrad. The day-to-day research work is carried out by a study coordinator, two psychological Ph. D. students, one research assistant, two student assistants, one medical doctoral student and several master students.

The FemNAT-CD team is proud to announce that in summer 2016, the official recruitment goal of the FemNAT-CD cross-sectional study has been achieved. So far, 295 children and adolescents have participated in the study. The "START NOW" intervention study, with its headquarters in Basel, has also been very successfully implemented in Aachen. Since February 2017, Malou Gundlach works as a Ph. D. student for the intervention study. She is supported by two "START NOW" supervisors, Prof. Dr. Nicola Großheinrich and Dr. Christine Wilhelm, as well as the entire FemNAT-CD team.



The FemNAT-CD team of Aachen in December 2016 on the local Christmas market.

## Experiences with “START NOW“ a report from one cooperating youth welfare institution

The social service of Catholic women e.V. Stolberg supports families and children around Aachen and consists of a counseling center, a family aid center, several children's day-care centers, an in-patient facility, as well as various daily groups. The in-patient facility, also known as “Agnesheim”, offers 87 stationary places for children and adolescents, which are divided into a total of 11 groups.

Since 2015, the “Agnesheim” has been involved in the "START NOW" intervention study. So far, one group of 8 girls, living at the stationary girls' group, has conducted the "START NOW" group training. A comparison control group is currently running and data on the Treatment-As-Usual is being collected. Ms. Ruzica Sacer, working for the psychological specialist service and functioning as our main contact person of “Agnesheim”, is a great support and responsible for coordinating the cooperation of the RWTH Hospital with the “Agnesheim”.



The following is a short report by Mrs Ruzica Sacer on the experience with "START NOW" from the girls' group of the "Agnesheim":

*The girls' group of "Agnesheim" offers 8 residential places for girls aged between 12 and 18 years. The girls are cared for in a shift service system by 5 social pedagogues and educators. Participation in the study initially triggered quite some excitement in both the girls and the caregivers, which in the course of time developed into increased attention. Despite personal crises and complications, we have made the experience that, as far as possible, the girls have shown a relatively high degree of reliability and commitment to complete the study. While participating in the "START NOW" group training, we felt that the girl's group cohesion and the willingness and ability to communicate improved. Some of the girls really enjoyed the individual sessions conducted weekly with the caretaker. The aim of the individual sessions was to help the girls personalize the "START NOW" program to their needs and to encourage the girls to train the basic "START NOW" skills. The study participation has brought a positive and enriching change into the working day, despite the increased efforts that came with filling out questionnaires and organizing assessments. Thus, e.g. the more mindful approach towards life and the new social skills trained within "START NOW" were perceived as enriching by the caregivers. And we, as trainers, have been much impressed by the honest efforts of the girls. A little while after the end of the group sessions, the "START NOW spirit" still seemed to positively influence the girls. Some of the girls kept talking about their shared experiences during "START NOW". Our conclusion at the end of the study:*

*We would do it again!*

