

# Year report 2020

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## 1 | About the association

**APAP SXM** stands for: **A**ssociation for **P**sychologists and **A**llied **P**rofessionals of St. Maarten.

APAP SXM has been established in 2016 to:

- promote the practice and professional development of psychology and related fields
- serve social and professional interests of psychologists and related professions on Sint Maarten (Dutch side)

How do we do that?

1. We actively follow the necessary standards in the field of psychology to guarantee the professional expertise of our members
2. We invest in the professional development of our members with training, supervision and following the latest developments in the workfield
3. We focus on establishing and maintaining professional conduct of the profession of psychologists and related profession in the interest of proper professional ethics
4. We build and maintain relationships with related organisations, both within and outside Sint Maarten
5. We promote the education of psychology in Sint Maarten
6. We provide information about psychology in Sint Maarten to different stakeholders
7. We lobby with different stakeholders in the community of St. Maarten with the goal of stimulating the quality of mental health on the island
8. We encourage and empower the study of scientific and professional aspects of the different specialization of psychology and promote the publication of writing on topics in the field of psychology and related topics

## 2 | Introduction from the president

This year has been a special year, you could even say an extraordinary year. Not just for me or the association, but for everyone on earth. This year a worldwide pandemic hit us that changed our daily lives from one moment to another. Similar as with the hurricane, but so different also. On St. Maarten the presence of COVID-19 was confirmed in March of this year. The traveling to our neighbouring islands or any other location off island was restricted and we went into a complete lockdown in the beginning April. Currently we are still in the middle of this all, although with less restrictions than during the lockdown. Unfortunately still with ups and downs in the numbers of infections hence most of us, me as well, are looking with hope to the new year with the introduction of the vaccin to get this under control and return to some form of normalcy.

This year has given us challenges and opportunities: on a personal, professional and societal level. Having to adjust to the conditions imposed on us, giving space for reflection and growth. But also showing the difficulties or vulnerabilities that can at times make us feel powerless, but also fueled movements and the needed outcry to create change. It has been interesting for our association to see and follow the attention for the mental health aspect and support several of our members to change their work activities to the digital space. We already had some experience with this matter due to our training activities in 2019 where we worked together with international trainers, which turned out to be a helpful experience for this year. When I look back I also appreciate the sharing together with the different members on how this impacts the professionals and clients and reflecting on what can be done to support each other. We can be proud to say that our association has grown in the number of members, and we will remain focused on supporting and building the field of psychology / mental health and in general the psychological well being of the people of Sint Maarten.

Written by: C. van Oost

Date: 30th of December 2020



### 3 | Activities 2020

#### Training activities 2020

The members who followed several training activities in 2018 and 2019 continued to build their therapeutic skills to serve the community of Sint Maarten with supervision sessions. These were done by some members in group form but also individually. Also a budget for literature was made available for the members to support their learning activities. The supervision activities took place digital with the involved trainers from the activities in 2018 and 2019. This activity concluded the training activities in the projects of the Association funded by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport of the Netherlands and the National Disaster Fund and has been received as useful and effective by all members to continue and improve the quality of their psychology services to the people of St. Maarten and neighbouring islands.

#### Community activities

As part of the activities directed towards connection to the community, several activities have been organized in 2020. This short overview shows the variety of activities as well as the increasing connection to the different organizations on the island.

#### *Information sharing*

Next level Thinking Season 2	The recordings of season 2 took place in 2019 as a follow up on the recording of season 1 in 2018. The airing had been postponed to 2020 and started end of March 2020 with 5 episodes: Frustrations, Social Media, Mindfulness, Happiness, Humor
Press release New Year	Article on the Facebook and in the Daily Herald to inform persons of the activities of the association, activities of the last year and planned activities for upcoming year
Several social media posts	To share information and activities of relevant stakeholders, to inform persons concerning psychological impact of the pandemic etcetera
Workshop about Mindfulness	In support of the Mental Health Awareness week organized by the Mental Health Foundation, two of our members gave a digital workshop about Mindfulness on the platform of MHF.
Publishing online document 'Psychological Recovery after Hurricanes Irma and Maria September 2017 on St. Maarten - Insights, Information and Experiences from the field'	As part of the project funded by the National Disaster Fund this document has been published to share information, experiences and findings related to the activities by the members of the association after the hurricanes in 2017 concerning psychological recovery. This document is accessible from our website via the following link: <a href="http://www.apapsxm.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Document-APAP-Psychosocial-Recovery-after-the-hurricanes-on-St.-Maarten-final-version.pdf">http://www.apapsxm.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Document-APAP-Psychosocial-Recovery-after-the-hurricanes-on-St.-Maarten-final-version.pdf</a>

### *Services*

In 2019 the Mindful Community Project started. This project has been made possible with the support and funding of the National Disaster Fund. A training has been designed, based on Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, for the community at large on St. Maarten to support with a group intervention to deal with stress. The participants were selected by the psychologists of APAP in collaboration with the general practitioners who have been informed of this initiative by the association. It started in September 2019 with the first group and ran until August 2020. The target group was 100 persons, with 5 groups for 20 persons. We managed to reach 136 persons, with 3 extra groups of each 12 persons with online sessions. The participants were very positive about the participation.

### **Professional interest psychologists**

#### *Private Practices representation*

A positive point has been that the SZV sent their proposal with adjustments of tariffs to the Ministry of the VSA this year. This has been supported in the last year by the association, and that this was finally concluded by SZV was much welcomed. Now it is awaiting the response from the Ministry.

The members with private practices formed an official subcommittee this year to discuss ongoing matters that are relevant for their specific activities. They focused for example on the COVID guidelines and translation for their practices, monitoring the amount of sessions granted by the insurance company, contacting the Minister of Finance concerning the Turnover Tax matter and the Minister of Public Health, Social Development and Labour (VSA) concerning the tariffs adjustment and the main insurance company on the island SZV concerning delayed payment of the OZR clients. In October of 2020 this was supported by a press release by the association concerning the World Mental Health Day in relation to the state of the mental health care on the island, where also the concerns were mentioned concerning the private practices on the island to be able to continue with their services.

On the agenda for this year was also the contact with the Ministry of VSA concerning the limited amount of psychologists allowed to practice on St. Maarten, related to the manpower planning (not only for the private practices but in general), and supporting the negotiations of the renewal of the contract with SZV from the private practices specifically. This did not take place due to the pandemic, and will hopefully be on the agenda for the next year.

### **Member and Board Matters**

#### *Changes in memberships*

We welcomed several new members this year: Udo Aron, Nathalie Humprey, Friedali Potgieter and Emmalexis Velasquez. Several more applicants were received at the end of this year and are hopefully officially welcomed in the beginning of this upcoming year. During the end of this year two board members gave up their board seat: Caroline van Oost and Zuleima Violenus to return to ordinary members. There were no persons who volunteered at this moment to take over their board seats. At the moment of writing this year's report no official transfer has taken place as yet from the 5 persons to the 3 remaining board persons and this is planned for the beginning of the new year.

### *Membership categories adjustments*

The task descriptions of the board memberships were finalized, together with the bylaws concerning the membership categories. These were made official during the general member meeting end of this year.

### *Intervision meetings*

Three intervision meetings took place in this last year. The first one was focused on sharing information from the persons who followed the advanced training concerning mindfulness with the other members. The second meeting was focused on the information relevant to support your work during the pandemic in a healthy manner, where the third one was focused on input from literature from members.

## **4 | Vision for 2021**

Even though a lot of people look back at 2020 as a year in which everything was brought to a halt, this year report shows our association was able to continue moving forward with a focus on strengthening the position of the psychologists on SXM by investing in professional growth and knowledge, and by continuing negotiations with SZV and Government on specific matters mentioned above. The year 2021 will be no different. APAP SXM was established to promote the practice and professional development of psychology and related fields and to serve social and professional interests of psychologists and related professions on Sint Maarten (Dutch side), which continues to be our mission this year.

The members of APAP SXM, including the new members, continue to inspire each other by sharing their knowledge and experience on different topics (like book inspiration, suicide awareness and mental health as a basic need) during their intervision meetings. In 2019 two members of APAP SXM started the GZ-opleiding by Rino Zuid in collaboration with Mental Health Caribbean. Two other members are involved in the roles of *werkbegeleider* and *praktijkopleider*, providing the required framework to complete the study locally. This study will result for the two participants in a BIG registration. The BIG-register is a governmental body that lists officially acknowledged providers of healthcare. Only BIG-registered professionals are legally authorised to use this protected title that stands for identifiable expertise and capability. APAP SXM promotes increasing quality of psychological care on Sint Maarten and therefore endorses the development of implementing the BIG register on Sint Maarten as well.

The association will start this year with workgroups that focus on a specific topic or mission. As mentioned before members of APAP SXM see mental health care as a basic need. Although the last couple of years mental health received more attention in awareness campaigns, mental health is still not considered as a primary need when you look at for example Government policies. Besides creating awareness in social media campaigns, members of APAP SXM would like to encourage the Government to take the next step from awareness to including mental health as a basic need in their policy. To be able to continue the services offered by the individual practices and organizations, the tariff adjustments will continue to be brought under attention of the Government, as well as the manpower planning.

In 2019 and 2020 APAP SXM was able to provide Mindfulness training to the community, subsidized by NRF. The feedback received from participants was very positive. The training not only had a big impact on their current well-being, but it also provides them with tools to deal with challenges the future has in store for them. The Mindfulness training in that sense strengthens the individual but also the community as it translates to their family system. The groupsetting also resulted in togetherness which is so important in general but specifically in challenging times like the hurricanes and now the pandemic. Members of APAP SXM strive for the Mindfulness training to be covered by insurance so the larger community can benefit.

After the hurricanes in 2017, members of APAP SXM voluntarily collected data on PTSD symptoms after a disaster. Data collection can give insight in the need for mental health care on the island, important information for the members but also for policy makers. Data collection is therefore one of the focus points for 2021. Ideas for example are collecting data on SZV compared to OZR and private clients and men/women ratio.

Besides inspiring each other as members of the association, we also have the ambition to connect to psychologists on the French side and other islands like Anguilla and Trinidad. This could lead to collaboration in data collection and exchange of knowledge and experience. Next to reaching out to other psychologists on and off the island, APAP SXM was asked to provide information on specific topics within our field to medical professionals working at SMMC. This will be scheduled for 2021 as well.

To round off on a celebratory note, 2021 is the year APAP SXM has her 5 year Lustrum! This means we will have to designate at least one workgroup to organize a festive event in which we will celebrate Mental Health as a basic need!

All in all, a lot to do! We highly appreciate all the voluntary time all the members put in to making this work, and hope to continue to do this in the future!