

# THE EMANCIPATION OF THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

## BARTIMÉUS ENHANCES SOCIAL ACCESSIBILITY

Bartiméus improves the quality of life for the blind and partially sighted by providing information, guidance, and personal advice. Bartiméus aims to find the best possible answer or tailor-made solution for any kind of sight-related problem in the field of education, leisure, housing, and work. Innovation runs through the veins of this institution. Having reached great progress in the advancement of self-reliance for the visually impaired, Bartiméus stands before an ever greater task: to emancipate society and create unhindered access to all aspects of modern life for its clients.

To this end, Henk van de Beld, director social projects, assembled a steering committee to enforce a new way of thinking and doing. "At Bartiméus, our clients are in the lead. The focus of attention shifted from creating the right segregated circumstances to stimulating a general accessibility of society. This means our organization has to be pro-active in finding solutions for clients who aspire to live a normal, independent life."

On an assignment with AAG, a consultancy agency in 's Hertogenbosch with financial, human resources, real estate, and educational services for care & cure organizations, Better Future saw an excellent opportunity for a partnership. Like Bartiméus, AAG was looking for a good way to cope with some organizational challenges: increase the synergy within and between teams, more attention for management development

and room for entrepreneurship. AAG specifically requested to link this process to its CSR strategy. Better Future proposed a leadership experience on location under the name 'Meaningful Learning' that would reinforce the learning goals of both parties.

Two years ago, Better Future had already connected Bartiméus project leaders to Hay Group consultants in a teambuilding leadership program. As a direct result of this intervention, the concepts of 'Dinner in the Dark' ([www.dinereinhethdonker.nl](http://www.dinereinhethdonker.nl)) and the 'Perception Experience' (a darkened room filled with obstacles in which visitors have to feel their way through) were commercialized. Both ideas serve two goals: attract a new flow of money and educate the public on what it means to be visually impaired.

Together with AAG, Bartiméus was able to follow through on this new path of social entrepreneurship. Two real life cases were at hand. First, AAG shared its expertise in commercial education to help Bartiméus bring its extensive experience with a growing group of partially sighted consumers to the market by developing special programs for companies and public service organizations. And second, the concept of 'Life Coaches' for the blind and partially sighted adolescent was developed. Bartiméus is even looking into the possibility of marketing this concept through a social business enterprise, with the hands-on, entrepreneurial support of AAG.