

CODE Forum 2026

Introduction to the Papers and Workshops

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Relational approach and safety in diaconal practice

In this presentation, practitioners from Netwerk DAK and researchers from the Protestant Theological University (PThU) present the findings of a collaborative study on relational work and safety in Dutch diaconal practices, focusing on Walk-in Centres and Street Pastoral Care.

Walk-in Centres offer radically hospitable meeting spaces for people who experience difficulties connecting with regular social networks. Volunteers, professionals, and visitors meet in an informal setting where meaningful relationships and mutual support are central. Street Pastoral Care serves people experiencing homelessness. Pastors meet them in their own environment, listen to their stories, and offer support when desired.

Following critical incidents involving violence, Netwerk DAK initiated a research project to explore safety challenges within these relational practices. The study was conducted jointly by professionals, volunteers, experts by experience, and academic researchers from the PThU.

The research identified factors contributing to violence and aggression analysed how these challenge the relational approach that characterises diaconal work. It also showed how a renewed relational approach, with a stronger focus on community building, can help prevent unsafe situations and strengthen social safety. One practical outcome was the development of the training program Relational Approach and Safety, which has since been delivered multiple times by Netwerk DAK. The presentation highlights both the research findings and the added value of collaboration between practice and academia.