

## Graduate interview | Gertrud is indispensable to older people in the centre of Amsterdam

You're never too old to learn. Graduate Gertrud Pijnenburg (65) is living proof of this. At the age of 57, she began a Master's in Physiotherapy in Geriatrics. Throughout the years, her physiotherapy practice in the heart of Amsterdam has been a true pillar of strength for the entire neighbourhood. Gertrud has completed many study programmes and gained experience, and in doing so has developed into a highly-skilled physiotherapist.

Gertrud's practice is located in the heart of Amsterdam, on a small street close to the canals. Here, you can still find the old Amsterdam. As a student, Gertrud came to live in the neighbourhood as a squatter. Her building was on a list of buildings to be demolished. Together with her fellow students and local residents, she fought to save the neighbourhood. She never left, and neither did many of her neighbours. The young people of then are the older people of today, and since 1991, Gertrud's home practice has grown to become an important cornerstone of the community. Together with her colleagues, Gertrud set up a fall prevention programme for older people. After all, Amsterdam is full of cobblestones, canals and pavements full of bicycles. This means it's not ideal for older people with mobility problems. Despite this, a relatively large number of older people live in the neighbourhood. They love the centre, and they appreciate that everything is within walking distance. When Gertrud completed her Master's degree, this meant a major party in the community house couldn't go amiss.

### **What do you do for older people in the neighbourhood?**

“We set up a fall prevention programme in partnership with other businesses in the neighbourhood. House prices in the centre of Amsterdam are high, and an extension is often impossible. We work with various gyms and halls in the neighbourhood. Together with students from the University of Amsterdam, I recently carried out a survey of the older people in this neighbourhood. This showed that there is a relatively high number of older people, but also that there are many barriers. These include bicycles on the pavement and slippery roads. To tackle this, we are mapping where the problems are. We then attempt to remove those obstacles, and train the older people to walk in this neighbourhood. We do so simply by leaving the building and walking routes that the older people often use. Geriatrics is very challenging and result-oriented work.

### **Why did you choose Geriatrics?**

“I noticed that I was beginning to grow older myself, and I wanted to learn how to help my generation better. One of the first things I learned during the course was how important it is for older people to do muscle strength training. This sets all the important bodily processes in motion. It results in a sort of domino effect. Taking exercise is also important, which is why I go everywhere by bicycle. I also encourage my patients to do the same. Before, I never wanted to specialise, because I really liked doing everything. But geriatrics is very broad, and so I still get to do what I like. You don't just work with vulnerable older people, but with all older people. This means prevention is really important, both for patients themselves and for society. This makes your work really important.”

### **What was the added value of a master's for you?**

“My master's made me a better physiotherapist. The difference lies in the scientific approach, and the clinical reasoning. I was part of the first group of students, as it was a new SOMT course in 2011. There were eight of us at first, and it was really intense. I hadn't studied properly since 1990. Of course I had done training programmes and courses, but that's different. I only got my first smartphone in 2013, and so I had a lot to learn about that too. All the same, it was a really fantastic experience.”

**Do you plan any further studies?**

“Although I enjoy learning, I think I've studied enough for now. I regularly give lectures these days, I attend seminars and conferences, and I'm also an internship lecturer at SOMT. I think the time has come for me, first and foremost, to pass on my knowledge.”