

## **Associate Professor Daan van Baalen has retired.**

After more than 50 years as an active professional, Daan van Baalen has retired from The Norwegian Gestalt Institute University College at the age of 81.

Daan studied medicine in Groningen in the Netherlands, worked for 10 years as a physician in Rotterdam, followed by nearly 10 years as a researcher and pathologist at Erasmus Hospital in the same city while training as a gestalt therapist and teacher at Multi-di-Mens (a Dutch/Belgian gestalt and psychosynthesis institute). He founded the Norwegian Gestalt Institute together with Gro Skottun and Grete Kandahl in 1986 and worked there full time starting in 1993, becoming an associate professor in 2011.

Daan has been passionate about the gestalt profession throughout his professional career as a gestalt therapist, teacher, and supervisor, while also helping to shape education programmes in gestalt therapy, coaching, and supervision. Some of the areas of theory that have interested him are field theory, the formation of figure/ground and foreground/background, the law of prägnanz, and polarities.

One of his most important contributions, in addition to starting education programmes, has been the development of the gestalt diagnosis form. This is an evaluation form for students, therapists, and coaches to use when working with clients. The form, which is completed after a therapy or coaching session, poses several questions about the contact that emerges between therapist/coach and client. The form was developed as an alternative to concepts from psychiatric diagnoses such as DSM and ICD in clinical practice. Daan claims that the medical and gestalt therapy paradigms are two different paradigms. He believes that gestalt therapists must work from a paradigm based on gestalt psychology's theories of perception, the law of prägnanz, figure/ground formations, and ideas from phenomenology, where we see a situation as it actually is with as little judgement and interpretation as possible. He believes that the medical diagnostic thinking focuses on what is sick in people, while gestalt practitioners, whether they work as therapists, coaches, or in organisations, look at what can be developed, what is possible. This thinking is based on the law of prägnanz, which posits that people do the best they can in the given situation they find themselves in.

In addition to his professional interests, Daan has been interested in the dissemination of the gestalt approach internationally. He served for many years on the board of the European Association for Gestalt Therapy (EAGT) and the European Association for Psychotherapy (EAP). He also co-founded the Norwegian Gestalt Therapist Association (NGF) and the Norwegian Association for Psychotherapy (NFP). He has taught and worked as a supervisor internationally and has been involved in establishing gestalt education programmes in Prague, Czech Republic and Budapest, Hungary.

There are many who are grateful for Daan's tireless work for the development of gestalt therapy both internationally and in Norway. Countless students, clients, and colleagues have experienced Daan's professional knowledge, commitment, warmth, wisdom, and stubbornness. He has never been afraid to speak his mind, to take a stand and fight for it. This has been necessary in the development of a new professional subject, a new

programme, and a university college, and has contributed to the university college's quality and recognition.

In recent years, Daan has taught and worked as a supervisor less and less due to his age. His 80th birthday was celebrated at NGL's conference in Sandvika just over a year ago. It was clear that he was nearing the end of his professional career. Now that he has retired, he can look back on a long and varied professional life in which he made many original and courageous choices. Daan is still passionate about our profession and its theory and is currently reading about Goldstein and his theory of self-actualisation. He is a living example of someone who self-actualises, who co-creates and is created by the situation he is in as a retired 81-year-old.

Gro Skottun

.