Loneliness and the value of bringing generations together

A practical guide on intergenerational exchange

Lonely? Let's unite!

Crossing borders in health

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1. SUMMARY

Intergenerational exchange as a concept has received more and more attention in recent years, partly because of demographic changes and societal challenges (such as COVID-19).
What is it?
Why intergenerational exchange?
And **how** to realize such exchange?

This guide is meant to inspire and provide practical information and examples of intergenerational exchange, and reasons why such exchange can be beneficial. This guide can therefore be useful for professionals working in the social, health or educational domain (e.g., community workers), policy-makers, NGOs, but also for people working for voluntary organizations who want to read about and know more about intergenerational exchange.

Throughout this guide we will go into more depth on how intergenerational exchange could be particularly interesting in relation to the topic of addressing loneliness.

The guide is divided into several parts. The first parts (Chapters 2 and 3) comprise a more theoretical background, whereas the last part (Chapter 4) focuses more on the practical side, providing some (regional) examples of initiatives, projects, but also of organizations. Note that this guide and the examples presented here are by no means exhaustive, but serve primarily as an inspiration.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Loneliness

Loneliness may affect all of us at some time during our life. However, older adults are at an increased risk of becoming lonely (6) due to, for example, losing a loved one or family-members (7). What do we mean by loneliness? Firstly, it is important to note that being alone is not the same as feeling lonely and vice versa. Loneliness may be defined as a subjective feeling of a discrepancy of someone's actual versus their preferred level and quality of social relationships (8), and it can be sub-divided into emotional and social loneliness (9). Emotional loneliness refers to, for example, the absence of an intimate person, whereas social loneliness refers to, for example, the absence of a social network (10).

Being lonely is in itself an unpleasant experience, but research shows that loneliness is associated with further negative consequences, including an increased risk of dementia (11), increased all-cause mortality, risk of cardiovascular disease and further mental health problems (12). Furthermore, research shows that people may experience stigma associated with feeling lonely (13), so that it is not always easy for someone to talk about feeling lonely.

2.1.1 Loneliness, age and risk factors

Although loneliness is often associated with older people, everyone may at some point feel lonely in their life. Loneliness has also been found to be prevalent in young adults (14, 15). However, the life events that trigger a sense of feeling lonely may differ between age groups and generations. Whereas for example in the younger generation life events such as leaving home to study at a university may increase the risk of feeling lonely, in older adults, life events such as retirement or the passing away of a close friend or partner could play an important role.

2.2 Ageing and societal challenges

The global population is ageing rapidly (16, 17) and, in developed countries, ageing has become an important social phenomenon (18), comprising several medical and social challenges. These include for example ageism, defined as stereotyping and having a negative view towards older people (17). Furthermore, cultural values such as individualism are becoming more prevalent in society (19) and may moderate the effect of loneliness on health (20). Another challenge is related to digitalization. Digitalization has accelerated because of the COVID-19 pandemic (21), and although this also led to certain benefits, there is a downside as not everyone is capable of finding their way through the digital landscape. This digitalization can thus represent a threat to the social inclusion of older adults (22). Furthermore this could potentially result in an increasing gap between generations.

In their global report on ageing, the World Health Organization (WHO) mentions promoting intergenerational contact interventions as one of three strategies for reducing ageism (23). Bringing together younger and older generations by means of intergenerational initiatives has the potential to stimulate more positive perspectives on ageing (24). Therefore, there is a need to strengthen solidarity between generations (25) and facilitate intergenerational exchange (22, 26). As loneliness is also prevalent in younger people, it is of importance to connect generations and open up conversations about loneliness as this too will help people gain a better understanding of one another's perspectives.

3. INTERGENERATIONAL EXCHANGE

3.1 How is intergenerational exchange defined?

Intergenerational exchange can be defined as an exchange between two generations, i.e., younger, usually 24 years or younger, and older age groups, usually 50 years and older (4, 27). Exchange may involve knowledge, experience, but also interaction in terms of activities. This exchange may be realized through participating in a program or intervention which involves shared and purposeful interactive activities and which may be implemented in different settings (18). These activities, which ought to be beneficial to all participants, can be structured or spontaneous. However, it is essential that intergenerational exchange is built around both generations and does not focus on one generation only.

> **❗ Intergenerational exchange can also be familial, or kinship-related. Throughout this guide we focus explicitly on non-familial exchange.**

3.2 What are the potential aims and benefits of intergenerational exchange?

Common needs and experience may exist that affect both young and old, such as the experience of feeling lonely or the need to feel included. Intergenerational contact and exchange can therefore create mutual understanding and help to build common bonds among generations.

Besides increasing understanding, many other benefits of intergenerational exchange exist. These include increasing social contact between generations, reducing negative perceptions of the other generation (think of ageism), creating meaningful relationships and fostering learning, emotional and social growth (18, 27, 28, 29, 30). This in turn may also lead to other physical and psychological health outcomes, including improved mental well-being and reduced feelings of loneliness.

Céline Dupont and Melina Tesson (2010) wrote a book on developing intergenerational actions and developed a table containing examples of the benefits of intergenerational exchanges based on exchanges with actors in the field. See below an overview as mentioned in their book "Comment développer une action intergénérationnelle (3)".

For the younger generation, meeting with other generations permits	For the middle generation, meeting with other generations permits	For the older generation, meeting with other generations permits	For all generations, meeting permits
learning about ageing	feeling useful, giving meaning to one's life	being productive and active; feeling useful; transmitting one's experience, one's history	helping build a more inclusive and tolerant society
learning about cultural and historical heritage	becoming an active citizen	learning new technologies, learning new knowledge, becoming familiar with recent discoveries	changing one's point of view about one another, opening the mind.
opening the mind, stimulating learning about life, about human relations	transmitting life experiences and relaying those of one's ancestors	breaking through loneliness and/or isolation	improving interpersonal, social and communication skills
transmitting one's reality, one's point of view of life	introducing an intergenerational perspective in the work context	forging new interpersonal relationships	stimulating self-esteem and identity building
being inscribed in human history and in one's own personal history, building one's own identity	accepting ageing is part of life	getting closer to one's grandchildren, one's children	increasing life experience, maturity

3.3 What does the scientific literature say about IG initiatives and loneliness?

Although there is little substantial scientific literature about intergenerational initiatives andW their (potential) role in reducing loneliness, evidence suggests a potential role for bringing together generations to address loneliness. The examples below were largely investigated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, Xu, Fields (31) examined a **telephone-based intergenerational program** (*"Big and mini"*) stimulating weekly phone calls, which was specifically developed to help older adults (55+) to cope with social isolation and loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic by connecting them with younger people (18+). Results showed that this intergenerational program increased intergenerational learning and connection and contributed to coping with loneliness, among other outcomes. Furthermore it showed mutual benefits for the participants. Another example comprised the concept of **reverse mentoring**, an approach where younger people provide support and knowledge to older people. In their pilot study, Juris and colleagues (32) investigated a reverse mentoring program (adaptation of the *Cyber-seniors mentoring program*) in which undergraduate university students mentored older adults (50+; mean age in this study 74 years) about

technology. This program was implemented during COVID-19 and found that loneliness was reduced significantly in older adults, but not in students. Older adults mentioned that they had learned new ways to interact with friends and family because of the new skills they had learnt. The finding of this pilot study suggests that this online reverse mentoring program improves social outcomes in older adults when person-to-person contact is difficult.

A third example comprises **virtual service-learning**. Service learning is an approach based on experiential learning, often applied to solve social issues. Ramamonjiarivelo, Osborne (33) investigated the effectiveness of an intergenerational virtual service-learning program during COVID-19. A group of undergraduate students were assigned to a 'service-learning project' in which they were paired to seniors (no ages were mentioned) living in communities surrounding the university. The students were asked to have at least 30 minutes virtual interaction per week with the seniors (e.g., Zoom or text messages). Results showed that loneliness (measured with UCLA) decreased significantly between pre- and post-test (pre-test 73.7, post-test mean 68.3). Furthermore, this study showed that service-learning also led to a less negative view on ageing (and/or ageism).

A final example found in the literature comprises **intergenerational group reminiscence**, a concept in which participants share personal experiences and events from the past. In their study Gaggioli, Morganti (34) examined an intergenerational group reminiscence intervention. This intervention constituted of forming mixed senior–student groups who met each week for two hours with the aim of empowering older adults and improving children's perception of ageing. These sessions were led by a psychologist who invited participants to share memories (storytelling) and interact with one another. For example, these included stories about past jobs and professions. The results suggest that this intervention had a positive impact on the psychosocial well-being of older adults, including a significant decrease in feelings of loneliness.

The studies presented above are just some examples (i.e., not exhaustive) of intergenerational programs that have been scientifically evaluated. Overall, it may be suggested that intergenerational initiatives or programs have the potential to reduce feelings of loneliness. However, it is good to bear in mind that more scientific evidence is still needed, also in terms of replicating the studies to other contexts and populations.

Furthermore, heterogeneity exists in terms of sample size (larger sample sizes are warranted), follow-up, and other aspects.

The scientific literature only shows a glimpse of what is in fact a broad range of intergenerational initiatives and programs. Many more such initiatives exist, although they have often not been the subject of research. In the next chapter, we will describe some initiatives, programs, and organizations that exist in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, to serve as inspiration for intergenerational exchange.

What factors determine the success of an intergenerational program? Peters, Ee (1), Giraudeau and Bailly (4), and Amyot (5) described some practical recommendations and success factors (for the full overview please see the respective sources):

- Ensure rights and respect to all who participate.
- Activities should be meaningful.
- Provide in advance information about the younger/older participants.
- Interaction should be regular and frequent.
- Look for a location that is suitable for both generations.
- Participants should feel useful and competent.
- Take enough time to ensure understanding.

What not to do?

Simply putting two generations together is not enough. Intergenerational exchange must be thought out and organized (2).

Tip

When communicating an intergenerational event, put some thought into channels of communication (flyers, newspapers, social media) (3)

4. EXAMPLES OF INTERGENERATIONAL INITIATIVES/PROGRAMS/ORGANIZATIONS

Within the euPrevent PROFILE project, we developed a training manual to organize and create intergenerational dialogue by means of a citizen summit. Several Citizen Summits were organized in the different regions. The participants, old and young, were very positive about these meetings and expressed their surprise that people from totally different generations can experience the same feelings of loneliness. Want to know more? Please visit our website.

In the next few pages, we will introduce you to various examples of intergenerational initiatives, projects and organizations. As many more examples actually exist, this overview is purely meant as an inspiration and to highlight that such examples may take on various forms and approaches, ranging from cooking together or watching a film together to sharing accommodation. One of the crucial elements of successful implementation is having the resources (financial as well as social). Furthermore, it is important to put some thought into ways of ensuring sustainability.

¨I have found there are similar problems across all generations¨
Participant (81 years), attending an intergenerational citizen summit

OMA'S SOEP

The Dutch foundation Oma's soep (ENG: Grandma's Soup) organizes weekly activities such as cooking days and Grandma's Soup at Home days. In addition, Grandma's Soup often organizes original events. These events are a special treat for the elderly.

¨**Cooking days provide meaning and fun**"

During cooking days, volunteers and elderly participants chat together as they cut vegetables. While the soup is cooking, the volunteers and the elderly usually play a game. When the soup is ready, they end the day by enjoying their homemade soup together. The elderly enjoy the cooking days enormously. Moreover, they appreciate the contact with the young volunteers. The structural contact and the fresh soup are good for their health. These cooking days provide meaning and fun.

On Soup at Home days, the volunteers make weekly visits to the elderly participants, bringing them packages full of delicious soup, a motivating card and a surprise at home. The goal is to create a moment to drink a nice cup of coffee together, take a walk or do some other activity together.

The Grandma's Soup Foundation facilitates these events for the elderly and supervises the student boards of the various Grandma's Soup cities. Each 'Grandma's Soup City' is governed by an annual student board. The student boards are responsible for organizing the activities and events for the elderly locally.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? PLEASE VISIT:
OMASSOEP.NL

1TOIT2AGES

1Toit2Ages is a Belgian organization that offers to connect young workers or students with older people who are interested in welcoming a person into their home. They oversee the creation of pairs and the duration of cohabitation. They also offer activities to these people individually or in pairs (workshop, meals in September, etc.). They are currently developing a new branch: renting a room for young adults in nursing homes.

It's a great success so far. Young people are happy to find cheap housing where they can also receive a little money by carrying out activities and where they can meet other people. The elderly are also happy to have new contacts and participate in different activities. For example, one young person runs a bar from 5 pm to 7 pm and this has brought new life into the nursing home.

> **¨It is reassuring for the person and the family not to be alone"**

Intergenerational:

The important thing is to create good pairs: an important aspect is that the person not only seeks financial support but also wants to meet and share with others. It is important to invest time in properly selecting the two people, to ensure that they will meet the other person's expectations and needs. The pairs also need to take time to create proper connections.

It is important that the organization is present and can take on the role of third party if difficulties are encountered (for mediation purposes, etc.)

In this type of intergenerational exchange, it is important to set up a convention. There is no lease commitment, but it is necessary to be able to frame the cohabitation and that the two participants engage with one another.

It is also essential to ensure that it is a genuine desire of the people concerned and not of the family (e.g., a child who does not want his parent to be alone or a family looking for a child solution). If the request doesn't come from the persons involved, it won't work.

Often, the hardest part for people is getting started. We must take time to inform them and the organization must offer good support.

Cohabitation: the feedback is very positive. In total, 4,058 pairs have been formed. Older participants report that this exchange brings new life, 'now I'm waiting for someone". Also, it reassures the person and their family that they are not alone if they should fall or encounter some other mishap. Advantage for the young person: offers a more reassuring and calm space. It creates exchange around and with the older person. Moreover, older participants tend to stay at home for longer, take less medication and remain more independent.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? PLEASE VISIT:
1TOIT2AGES.BE

EXPRESSION DE SAGESSE

"Expression de Sagesse" is an initiative developed in the Walloon region of Belgium. This association accompanies seniors in fictionalizing their personal experience and transmitting it through children's books that they create in collaboration with young illustrators. Writing workshops are organized in nursing homes. Each pair collaborates for several months and creates a youth album. This project is based on the idea that everyone has things to transmit and that people can learn and create at any age. Designing and reading these albums creates bridges between generations that have rarely had the chance to interact with one another. Meetings are also organized in schools between authors, illustrators and young readers. "Expression de Sagesse" conveys a positive vision of ageing. This initiative aims to rethink the place of seniors in society as well as to enhance their knowledge and abilities through intergenerational exchange.

**¨Everyone has things to transmit"**

The main challenge:
Funding this initiative has been our main challenge since the beginning. The idea of this initiative was born in 2013 and the first writing workshop in a nursing home took place in 2016. Since the launch of this initiative, we haven't stopped "knocking on doors" for support but without much success. We persevere, however, and owe the success and longevity of our project to the solidarity and unconditional support of our few volunteers. We have carried out three crowdfunding campaigns to print our books. To this day, our collection consists of 11 albums.

¨People can learn and create at any age"

An anecdote:
Our first book came out in December 2017, Marie-Thérèse (Zette), its author was 87 years old. In January, we went to a third-grade class to introduce the book to the children. Zette arrived at the school, walking with difficulty and with the help of her walker. We settled into the classroom, waiting for the students who were on a break.
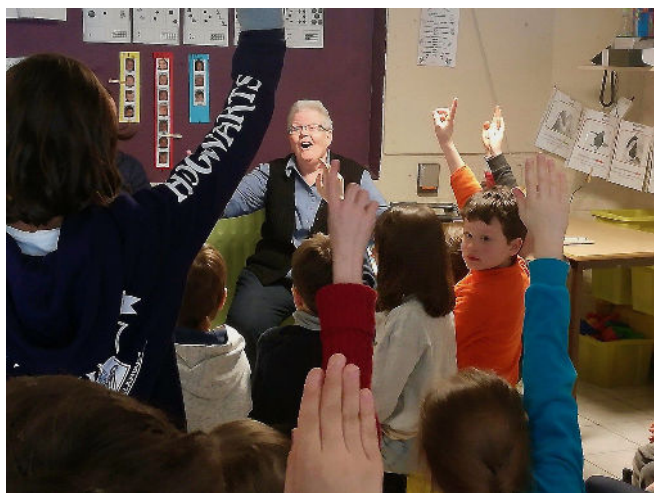
A young boy came to meet the pair, Zette and Colin (the illustrator). Zette's eyes began to shine. We briefly introduced the album and then Zette started reading her story. She was sitting in front of the children. Halfway through the book, driven by the students' many questions, Zette stood up and began to question the children who raised their fingers, as she had always done during her carrier as a teacher.

What we saw in front of us was a teacher full of energy. That day something happened, and I understood the impact that this initiative could have, and even today, when I have doubts, I just have to think back to that moment to find my full motivation.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? PLEASE VISIT:
EXPRESSIONDESAGESSE.COM

THE ADOPTION PROJECT: JONG ADOPTS OLD

The Adoption Project: jong adopteert oud (the young adopt the elderly) is a Dutch intergenerational initiative that is based on creating a connection between a primary school and nursing home (close by) and bringing pupils into contact with people suffering from dementia. The children receive a lesson about dementia from a trained volunteer and after this lesson they visit the nursing home, often in smaller groups. During these visits the children undertake all kinds of activities with the people with dementia, such as painting together, cooking together, or playing games together. Together is the key word. The Adoption Project aims at reducing the stigma and taboo associated with dementia, getting children to understand the world of people living with dementia, and improving the well-being of the people living with dementia. This easy to tailor initiative is a collaboration between Alzheimer Nederland and Alzheimer Centrum Limburg, Maastricht, The Netherlands.

> **¨The visit puts a smile on the face of the elderly with dementia”**

Challenge:
Since the COVID-19 pandemic, it can sometimes be a challenge to motivate schools to participate in the Adoption Project (due to already having a full program). To overcome this challenge, we try to highlight how tailor-made and flexible this initiative is, but also how well it fits in with the role of active citizenship. Based on the needs and wishes (e.g., frequency, duration, kind of activities), we try to create a tailor-made connection.

Success story:
Many success stories can be cited. For example, 'I got a bonus grandma!,' says a pupil enthusiastically after visiting the people with dementia in a care institution. Not only do the children really enjoy the visits, but they also get to know and understand the world of people with dementia. One of the school teachers indicated: 'The guest lesson gave the children a lot of explanation in advance. You notice that this makes the visits less 'over-exciting' for the children, because they know what they can expect.' The visit puts a smile on the face of an elderly person with dementia.

An employee of a care institution recounts how valuable the project is for the residents: 'It stimulates the residents to make contact and have fun'. In addition, they notice that the visit creates a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? PLEASE VISIT:
ALZHEIMER-NEDERLAND.NL

ENTR'ÂGES

Entr'âges is an association whose mission is to promote links between people of different generations in a dynamic of solidarity and reciprocity. The association also engages in work on sensitization and the fight against ageism by realizing events and projects throughout the whole of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

The association also has a unique Documentation Centre in Belgium specialized in the issues of ageism, intergenerational and social aspects related to ageing, accessible to all persons interested in this theme in a professional or private context.

There are two types of intergenerational events:
1. Create a time of exchange where the goal is to work on the intergenerational exchange
2. Create a time of exchange and sharing that leads to being in the intergenerational exchange.

This requires defining basic objectives. Sometimes an event was not intended with an intergenerational focus at all, but only became so because of the people who register.

These intergenerational moments can also be worked on through the focus of "lifelong education", explaining that people have a place in society and that this must be fulfilled. This gives the power to build together, between generations.

It is rare for different generations to meet outside the family context. It is therefore an important challenge for society as well. When children are asked, it seems that they don't really have an intergenerational friendship.

Intergenerational exchanges are not easy to set up. There must be a point of exchange, a dynamic of reciprocal exchange, finding a necessity for meeting the other person. Everyone must get something out of the meeting. We have to find out what collective ground exists, because sometimes there are many differences and misunderstandings in how the other person sees the world.

These exchange moments are sometimes very stereotyped, e.g. exchanges involving learning how to use the internet or something similar, but this is not the only theme on which reciprocity can exist.

In society, the younger partner in a relationship (the older person is often in care, in need of support) ensures that everything is going well, that he/she keeps his/her appointments, etc. This is not a reciprocal situation. It is also a great challenge for nursing homes: homes are very often only oriented towards care both in activities and in the budget. However, the well-being of the older person is related not only to the care received but is multidimensional. We must not forget that the people in the homes are fully-fledged citizens and we must be able to give them their place and their power to act. In nursing homes, it is also important to build the meeting with residents, to engage them in this moment.

The notion of temporality is also important. There may be a one-shot meeting but then we are more in a state of awareness. If we really want to connect, we have to take time. The choice of activity is even more important since it must generate interest for all in order to make the participants want to get involved.

There is also the challenge of space: finding a space accessible to all, while elderly people sometimes have trouble moving. We have to go where people are. Meetings are not always possible in a common space. In that case we work by correspondence (writing, recording, etc.)

Another important aspect is interculturality. In addition to being enriched by the different generations, these meetings can also be enriched by the different cultures of the participants. This requires being careful, as it can sometimes bring moments of sharing and interest for one another but we may also see a gap with people having a negative view because they are from different cultures. Each time it is important to prepare the group dynamics well and to remember that we are all at the same level. Such moments also allow us to work on stereotypes that are linked to culture.

These moments are also very important to help combat stereotypic opinions related to generation and age. Both ends of the age spectrum often tend to be defined by their age: too young for this, too old for that, etc. More complexity is needed in defining generation at the extreme ages. There are intergenerational stereotypes (young people don't understand anything, old people are too rigid, etc.) but also intra-generation stereotypes: sometimes you isolate yourself in the stereotype of your generation (I'm too young to give my opinion, etc.). Ageism is both a goal (fight) and a challenge.

Entr'âge develops and accompanies many projects. For example:

- Comptine-âge: working on age stereotypes using youth books. Groups of seniors are trained to read books to young people. This can be done in classrooms, in libraries, etc. with elderly people from all walks of life, especially nursing homes. The youth book is also a beautiful medium for addressing social issues.

- Artistic project with an intergenerational group of people with social and/or mental difficulties: theatrical representation, slam theatre, etc. In addition to exchanges within the group, they also meet artists who come to testify, accompany them in their creation, etc.

INTERGENERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF MALTESER IN AACHEN-RICHTERICH

The Malteser meeting place in Aachen-Richterich creates new meeting spaces for people of all ages in the neighbourhood. With the support of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the Malteser meeting place in Aachen-Richterich pursues the goal of creating new access routes to senior citizens and contributing to the prevention of loneliness and the removal of taboos surrounding the topic of loneliness in the Malteser project "Together – For Each Other".

Diverse offers include, for example, a visiting service, a cultural escort service, the "mobile shopping trolley" project, an IT senior citizens' meeting place and a telephone meeting place - as well as numerous other activities in the leisure sector that counteract the loneliness of senior citizens – especially with a variety of intergenerational activities.

Malteser
...weil Nähe zählt.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? PLEASE VISIT:
WWW.MALTESER.DE

VOLUNTEER SERVICES BY YOUNGER PEOPLE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

The success of this project is based on the fact that younger people are explicitly offered an opportunity to get involved in the various voluntary services (dementia service, creative offers, teaching IT skills, mobile shopping trolley, visiting service) at the Malteser Aachen- Richterich location. A commitment adapted to the needs and abilities of the young people is offered and encouraged.

The young volunteers are very interested in being told something about the life story of the senior citizens. They benefit from the experience, as their own grandparents are not available or nearby to share with. The senior citizens receive new impulses and a different perspective on their experience through contact with the younger generation. Through activation and accompaniment, senior citizens again participate in activities within a community or society.

The biggest challenge within the context of these projects is that the commitment of young people (18-28 years) is in most cases limited in time. Due to their studies and part-time jobs, they do not have as much time at their disposal. The duration of their commitment is often determined by a change of residence after graduation. Contacts that have been established need to be brought to a good conclusion.

INTERGENERATIONAL INITIATIVES IN THE DISTRICT OF DÜREN

With a cross-generational approach, the district of Düren has been tackling various task spectrums for many years. The coordination office **"Pro Seniorinnen und Senioren im Kreis Düren"** (Pro Seniors in the District of Düren) in the "Amt für Generationen, Demografie, Inklusion und Sozialplanung" (Office for Generations, Demography, Inclusion and Social Planning) pursues the goal of offering counselling, further training and assistance in relation to all aspects of old age. It also promotes the initiation of offers and projects in the field of senior citizens' work and civic engagement: the focus is on cooperation and model projects with the "participation of committed local people who are involved in the interests of the community".

Initiatives and projects to promote intergenerational exchange in the district of Düren
Within the framework of the **"Interessengemeinschaft Seniorenarbeit Raum Düren-Jülich"** (ISaR), founded in 2002, almost 300 institutions and about 1700 individuals from the entire district work together.

Among other things, they focus on activities that promote the social coexistence of generations and cultures.

The model project **"Demografiewerkstatt Kommunen"** (Demographic Workshop Communities), together with "In Sorge" (In Care), the initiative "Sorgekultur" (Culture of Care), has enabled the district of Düren to **qualify volunteers** in all towns and municipalities of the district of Düren as voluntary care officers in 2019: They make sure that people who are not well are not left alone. In the meantime, every municipality has care officers who organize effective support when needed.

In 2018, it was already possible to hold a "**Poetry Slam - Words that connect"** as part of the event series "**Wir. Gemeinsam. Generations in the District of Düren**": a cooperation between the District of Düren, the European School Langerwehe and the Interessengemeinschaft Seniorenarbeit Raum Düren-Jülich (ISaR).

Since 2021, the district of Düren has been involved in the federal programme "Local Alliances for People with Dementia". Numerous institutions are networked here with the aim of supporting people with dementia and their relatives. Guidance on local offers is provided, actors are brought together, activities are coordinated and new offers are developed. The coordination office "Pro Seniorinnen und Senioren im Kreis Düren" (Pro Senior Citizens in the District of Düren) has made it its task in this programme to focus on the needs of those affected and their relatives and to organise low-threshold offers and activities.

Tackling the future – after the pandemic

The pandemic resulted in flexible online formats being created. For example, the status and needs analysis for the survey of voluntary commitment and voluntary work in the district of Düren was carried out online without further ado – and with great success. People of all age groups from the most diverse areas of voluntary work took part.

With the insights gained, the district of Düren, with the participation of numerous actors, has now developed a concept for action to promote voluntary work – because "a liveable region also lives from committed local people who contribute to the interests of the community", according to the authors of the final report.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? PLEASE VISIT:
FFG.TU-DORTMUND.DE

PORTRAIT ME

Artists' team against loneliness and for more digitalisation in old age

In 2016, the Cologne-based artist Anna Hepp received a renowned start-up grant in North Rhine-Westphalia for her idea on the topic of "Cultural participation for older people made possible by digitalization". This gave rise to the artists' collective PORTRAIT ME, which has since been realizing innovative projects for the digital participation of older people. Since then, the collective has been very committed and passionate about a common affair of the heart: bringing social and artistic-cultural issues into harmony with one another. PORTRAIT ME focuses on a very relevant topic: age(s)! The PORTRAIT ME artists themselves belong to different generations between the ages of 28 and 70. This makes it possible to build a bridge between YOUNG and OLD in an authentic way. Most of PORTRAIT ME's projects are creative digital-analogue workshops. Here, mobile phone or tablet use is communicated creatively and with a lot of fun through artistic activity. In order to contribute more to social connection and exchange, our amateurs are seniors 65+, some of them children aged 10-12. The artists use step-by-step instructions to awaken the participants' own artistic–playful potential and at the same time transmit digital competence. The exchange is encouraged and makes learning "child's play" for everyone. Even before the Corona crisis, PORTRAIT ME recognised that digitalisation benefits the older generation in particular. Learning digital communication and media at an early age is an important way to counteract loneliness and isolation and to enable senior citizens in particular to have more self-determination. In direct contact with younger generations, Portrait Me ensures an intergenerational exchange in the workshops. Children also experience loneliness. For various reasons, many children have no contact with their own grandparents and experience a lively and valuable exchange with elderly participants in the workshops.

Experience shows that senior citizens still have a great deal of difficulty in actively shaping the digital revolution and that they need external impetus. PORTRAIT ME takes away these fears and transforms them into joy, self-confidence and a sense of achievement: Ilona, 68, as feedback after a PORTRAIT ME workshop: "I thought "I don't need that". But now I've lost my shyness about it and am on my way to getting one of those smartphones.

"Hannelore, 79: "Often you feel insecure in front of strangers "Oh God, you're embarrassing yourself, you can't be that stupid" and you say "we're stupid too" in your jargon, and that takes away those inhibitions and fears." Annemie, 77: "I don't want to be without WhatsApp any more. I love the creativity. I always try to learn something new and try it out. That's why I love being here with you." The older generation speaks differently in images than the young. We want to close this generation gap and learn this visual language from one another and with one another in new workshops. The kids are happy to help grandparents with their digital knowledge, while the grandparents tell the children stories from the past. For this purpose, their own smartphones are used as cameras and the photo functions on the smartphone are explored through instruction and mutual showing: texts are written on the tablet, collages are made and topics that are close to the hearts of the participants are illustrated.

After the first introduction to the technique, the amateurs get to MAKE and experiment: the participants create picture stories on their very own topics they have brought with them, on their passion or hobby and present them in the workshop. In feedback rounds we try to point out new forms of picture language and also to get to the bottom of the stories. At the end of the workshop, creative results are always created by the participants themselves, which can then be used for their own purposes. Analogue photo books, i.e., photo books with so-called augmented reality images, exhibitions, photographs to take home, etc. The most recent projects are in the field of augmented reality and virtual reality. It is and remains exciting!

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