

Intergenerational Dialogue Event "Loneliness" within the euPrevent PROFILE Project PrymPark Düren

Organizer: BAGSO - German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations

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Lonely? Let's unite!

Report: Procedure, impressions, reflections and outcomes

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1. Who and where? Participants and location

In the center of an intergenerational housing project, participants between 17 and 84 years of age came together on a Friday afternoon. Building on the concept of intergenerational dialogue events on the topic of loneliness, they spent 4.5 hours in intensive exchange and sharing.

The group was heterogeneous and diverse, recruited through intensive verbal advertising, mail distribution lists of BAGSO and local and associated project partners in the weeks and days preceding the event.

The main PROFILE project partners in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine are:

- Aachen City Region, Office for Inclusion and Social Planning („Kompetenznetz Gesundheitsförderung im Alter der StädteRegion Aachen“)
- District of Düren, Office for Demography, Children, Youth, Family and Senior Citizens (coordination office "Pro Seniorinnen und Senioren im Kreis Düren")
- Malteser in the Diocese of Aachen
- Regionalbüro Alter, Pflege und Demenz Aachen/Eifel

Among other things, they all used their own contacts and events to promote the dialogue. These included, for example, vocational schools, youth associations, various social institutions for senior citizens' work and employees, senior citizens' representatives and councils in the cities and communities of the region. To register for the free participation, there was a registration form on the website as well as the possibility to register in person.

The slow registration behaviour (many registrations came only a few days before the event) and several late cancellations were probably still influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic (fear of infection and regulations). Such dynamics and unpredictability may have to be expected at other times as well, and this places high demands on the organizing team in the field.

Due to illness, there were a number of cancellations, so that in the end only 17 participants from different generations and regions came to Düren from the 26 originally registered. Despite corresponding initiative of partners in East-Belgium there were no registrations from Belgium, among other things due to the long distance as well as the ongoing final examinations in the schools.

It was also agreed in advance - but not communicated in the invitation - that all participants would receive a certificate of participation.

From the Invitation e-mail

We invite open-minded and interested citizens in the age groups between 16-27 years and 55+ years to our dialogue event in Düren on June 10, 2022.

Have you had experiences (direct or indirect) of loneliness and isolation during the pandemic? Are you interested and curious to talk about this with people of other generations?

We would also like to talk about positive experiences of increased solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic - everywhere in families, communities and neighbourhoods, where new connections, trust and respect between generations were built through mutual support.

What will I experience?

- Discussions and conversations about mental health in a variety of life situations.
- Stimulation for self-reflection as well as an exchange of experiences and opinions with members of other generations
- a "change of perspective" and more mutual understanding between generations
- Possibilities to present or jointly develop own ideas for intergenerational initiatives and own projects against loneliness.

How does the event work?

The afternoon is participatory and interactive and lasts - with breaks - four hours. It is about:

- getting in touch with each other/exchanging ideas.
- open up the topic of loneliness
- jointly develop ideas for intergenerational cooperation/prevention of loneliness

What finally motivated those who were present?

In response to the open question in the evaluation form, which was filled out at the end of the event, the following answers were given: "Topic of loneliness" (6), "interest" and "curiosity" (4), "contact" and "exchange" with others/ with the youth (4), personal invitation (3), (partial) own concern (2)



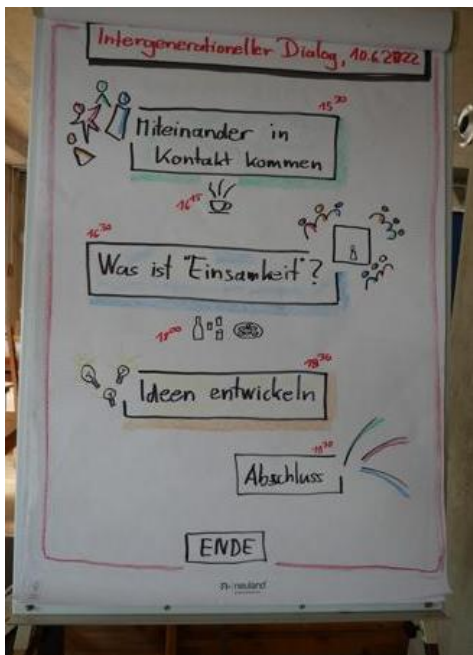
The choice of a housing project as venue worked out to be very successful. A project coordinator offered an introduction with a tour of the different community spaces before the event for those interested. The space for the dialogue event was the project's central dining room. In contrast to perhaps functionally better-equipped conference rooms (e.g., bulletin boards, which had

to be organised separately here), the room breathed "in the middle of life." Outside in front of the large windows, children or adult residents of the project were constantly passing by, the furniture and the equipment of the room created a homely atmosphere that was close to everyday life. The venue also offered space for parallel small groups in the room as well as for informal conversations during breaks and at the evening snack.

2. How and what? Structuring of the event and results

The event was divided into three blocks, as suggested in the guidelines for such intergenerational events, as already made transparent to all participants in the invitation:

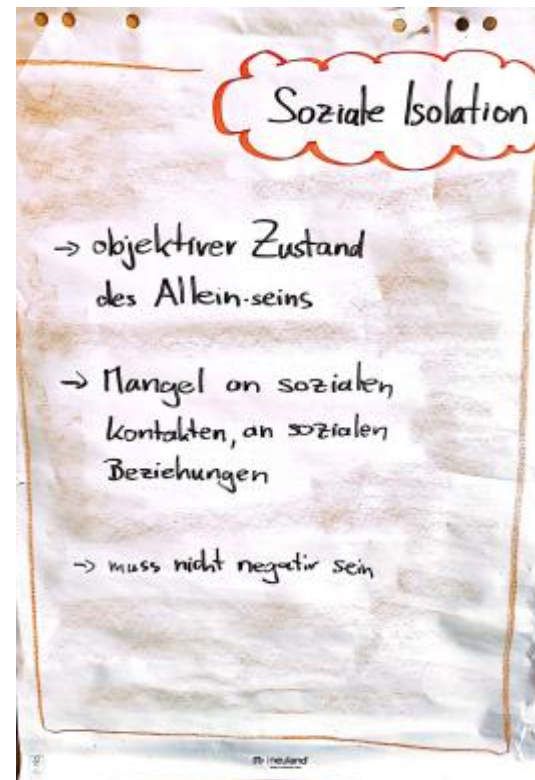
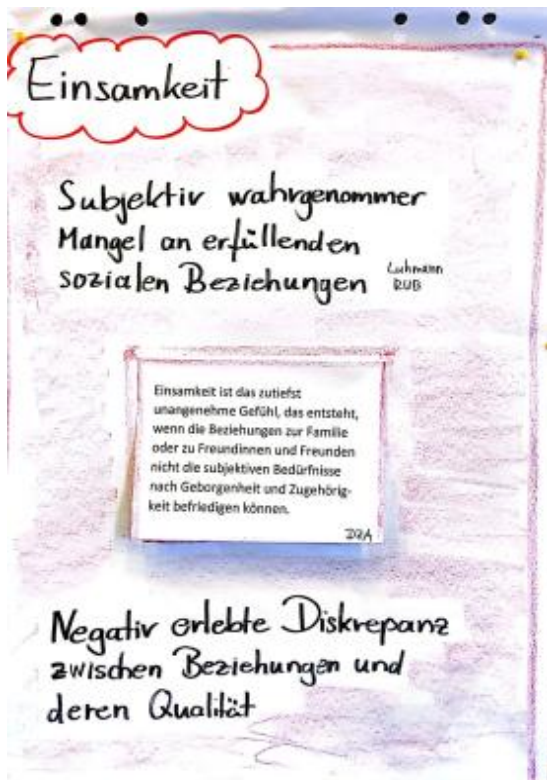
- Getting in touch with each other
- Exploring the topic of loneliness
- Developing ideas for action



In the total time of 4.5 hours, a break for coffee was planned, as well as a longer break for an evening snack, since the event went on until 8 pm.

Getting in touch with each other

After the welcome, there was first a brief explanation of the PROFILE project and how the event fits into the European project context. The organizational clarifications also included the group's agreement to call each other by the first name during this workshop and to wear name tags. The participants were very quickly prepared to address each other by their first names, and one older participant commented with a positive connotation: "It's more anonymous that way."



In order to get in touch with each other as participants as well as with the topic, several methods were carried out. First, the facilitator presented two posters with descriptions of the terms "loneliness" and "social isolation." These statements were not discussed, but were briefly explained and visibly placed in the room as a common basis for the afternoon. The participants received this positively and did not ask any questions.

The first introduction of the participants was intentionally not based on age and the order of the circle of chairs. The participants were asked to arrange themselves according to their place of residence, so that very generationally mixed small groups emerged spontaneously. The places were then named and the participants briefly introduced themselves..

In the following constellation "Who deals with the topic of loneliness professionally, as a volunteer, or privately?" it became clear that four participants have a professional background on the topic.

The next list asked "How lonely do I feel? How much have I experienced loneliness myself?". Participants could associate themselves with the criteria "never, rarely, often, a lot." Most of the group placed themselves between "rarely and often", one participant spontaneously went to "a lot".

The moderator used this line-up to briefly explain: no one stands at "never", everyone has some kind of experience with loneliness. And: it takes courage to stand by "a lot", because the topic is often tabooed and shamed in our society.

The last line-up was a circle in which participants arranged themselves according to age ("generation line"). In turn, the participants once again gave their name and their respective age. This revealed that the age range in the group was from 17 to 84.



The moderator valueably emphasized that there are 67 years between the youngest and the oldest and that this stands for a great diversity in the group. She asked who feels that they belong with whom in a generation and briefly explained the historical-sociological concept of generation, which refers to common worlds of experience. Further questioning revealed that, for example, the 4 young participants (17 - 27 years old) do not see themselves exclusively as one generation, nor do the younger seniors who are still working at 55 - 65 years old see themselves in the same generation as the 75 - 84 year olds. Without pinpointing generational groups, the moderator stated as a conclusion that there were probably at least 5 to 6 distinguishable generations at the meeting had come together. For the further course were then spoken of the 3 generation groups: younger generations, younger older generations, older generations.

Exploring the topic of loneliness



The second block of the afternoon focused on the participants' own experiences with loneliness. First, the whole group divided into 4 small groups of 4 - 5 people. The facilitator made sure that there was one of the young participants in each small group. During the previous coffee break, she had discussed this with the young participants to ensure that they did not feel overburdened in the sense of being "left alone".

During the 20-minute storytelling phase in the mixed-generation groups, intensive discussions took place. These were deliberately not documented in order to leave all attention for good listening.

Afterwards, everyone went into generation-specific groups (younger generations, younger older generations, older generations). They discussed the question "What did we become aware of in the storytelling rounds about loneliness in our own generation group?" and noted down individual aspects on a pin board using moderation cards. The intensity of the discussion in this round showed the value of exchange within the confidential peer group.

After this thematic phase, all groups were given the opportunity to briefly look at the pinboards of the other generation groups as a group and let them have an impression on them.

In the plenum, all aspects were then presented by the respective generation groups and explained through return questions.

The content results of these two work phases:

Younger: At the pin board of the younger generation, several follow-up questions came up: What is Generation Z? What does paralysis mean? What does "peer group" mean? Loneliness can also lead to depression? The explanations by the participants of this generation group made clear: Younger people also experience loneliness, in the Corona pandemic this was sharpened by the lack of contact to peers, by loneliness in the family, quite a few young people had/have suicidal thoughts. New questions came up in the discussion: Did this also exist in the past in adolescence and was it just less present in the media and were there too few numbers? The importance of social media/digitization was also discussed: on the one hand, they can increase loneliness (one has contact ("friends") with many people, but not really), on the other hand, they can also help to counteract loneliness.



Younger- Older People: In this group, the search and longing for sustainable relationships is an important theme. The price of newly won freedoms, self-determination and freedom (after separations, divorces, retirement) can be loneliness. Moreover, loneliness sometimes arises in retirement because professional recognition is no longer available. On the other hand, being alone can help to find out "who I really am".

Older Older People: Here it is evident that death (of partners, friends, neighbors) is an important topic and cause of loneliness. Other aspects mentioned were poverty and physical/health-related illnesses and limitations. With the keyword "incompatible", the group pointed out that one's own personality also has an influence on loneliness: One develops more and more quirks as one ages, sometimes becoming even more orderly/pedantic in old age - or the opposite, or harder/softer in contact with others.

After these presentations from the three generational groups, the facilitator pointed out important risk factors that promote loneliness: e.g., poverty, the COVID 19 pandemic, the death of loved ones, health changes, mental illnesses, etc.

Health changes in particular can be both a cause and an effect of loneliness. In this context, it is often true that "loneliness comes about rather gradually." Overall, the group results as well as the discussions made it clear: The contexts of how loneliness arises and is experienced are partly similar in the generations, but partly also very different.

At the end of this thematic part of the event, the participants were invited to share in pairs what touched them most about the shared exploration of loneliness.

Ideas for action for intergenerational projects for the prevention and reduction of loneliness



A plenary brainstorming session at the beginning of this third part of the event already brought together a wealth of experiences, ideas or things heard.

- Example of multigenerational living in PymPark. A participant who lives there: "But you also have to do something for it."
- The Malteser "Together and Care for Each Other" Project
- Qualified care officers in every community in Düren in the "Düren sorgsam" project, which coordinates contact points and services. This also includes crisis intervention services.
- Interest group for senior citizens in Düren: decentralized meeting points in all parts of the city ("Aktiv vor Ort"), e.g. in community centers, which also reach many very old people.
- Malteser Jugend: young people can experience community in a youth association.
- Ask yourself the question: What actually connects me with other people (instead of only looking at the individual/other)?
- Cultural Companion in Aachen (Malteser): Bringing people together through a shared interest
- Integration guides, also meanwhile (youth) integration guides
- Chancenpatenschaften: seniors support refugees (Düren) - prevention of loneliness on both sides
- Pocket money exchange, with which young people support older people
- Videoconferencing (in this also worked during Covid)

- Visiting services, telephone contacts
- Further fields of action or starting points: Actions in the neighborhood, excursions (e.g. Rikscha project Aachen), sports, exercise, music and culture
- Question from a participant: What are the adults doing wrong that we are losing the childlike need and competence for community? In school we are taught something wrong. Therefore, social change is necessary.

Afterwards, the participants assigned themselves to four different groups, in which they discussed different questions for the development of ideas for action in greater depth.



The following suggestions emerged

1. What are the special challenges for intergenerational projects against loneliness?

It requires courage to think things in a completely new way. Currently, something is going wrong. Time and patience are needed, as well as courage to question old habits. For each individual, the question is: How can I find a way to feel good? ("I am the most important person in my life").

2. How should intergenerational projects be designed so that people (both young and old) get involved?

Projects should be as cost-free as possible, and it should be easy to get started. For this purpose, sponsors can be sought or cooperations can be established (e.g. a senior citizens' home and a youth association). In addition, good advertising should be done to reach younger people - also via social media (e.g. Instagram). The time frame must fit everyone; wishes and interests of all age groups must be taken into account. It is good when a project becomes a self-

runner. Other important framework conditions for a commitment: good accessibility; consider benefits for all age groups (e.g. certificate for young people, tips for operating smartphones for older people). The basic criteria are always the same: everyone must benefit; it is important to look for the overlaps to reach a "with each other" - not "for each other".

3. Which places are suitable for intergenerational projects?

The places should be easily accessible, e.g. without registration, free of charge. Public space "outside" offers many possibilities (jogging in the park, joint early morning sports; playing boules, generation playgrounds). Free museum days are also a good offer. Urban planning measures such as car-free zones, benches, etc. can promote contacts (examples from large cities).

4. Concrete project ideas

Older people teach young people; joint sports projects (miniature golf, table tennis, canoeing, dancing); joint handicrafts (insect hotel, bird incubators); joint cooking, beer brewing ("do something original!"). Furthermore, old people's homes and kindergardens can be brought together. The project "Hospice makes school" (in Düren - will also be implemented in other municipalities) goes to schools and thus tries to sensitize young people to the topics of death/dying at a very early stage.

3. Overall assessment and findings

The experiences in the run-up to the event showed how important it is to advertise carefully and that it is indispensable to use different ways to attract interested parties to such a dialogue.

The significantly reduced number of participants due to illness and last-minute cancellations once again points out that the recruitment of younger participants in particular must be carried out with great care. And - due to the non-binding nature of free participation as well as other factors - unpredictable dynamics must always be expected.

Overall, the dialogue event was judged to be very successful by the participants, as the feedback also shows. All participants approached the event with great openness, concentration and willingness to learn.

On the dialogue between the generations

What did you particularly like? (excerpts)

- The differentiated program
- The openness
- To have insights/views mirrored to you
- Openness of the young people
- The group discussions
- Dialogue with young and old
- Open interaction between the generations
- Openness, relaxed atmosphere
- Moderation, methods
- Diversity, different age groups
- Many interactive work phases
- Many points surprisingly the same for young and old
- Good exchange between different generations

From the perspective of the organizer and the moderator, the underlying concept of a dialogue event (as described in the guidelines) worked well. The good framework conditions, such as the location, an extensive time window of 4.5 hours and a delicious snack, contributed to a good learning atmosphere and the intensive cooperation of all participants.

It also became clear how much the topic of loneliness moves some participants emotionally and how important it is to have protected, trusting spaces for exchange and good group support. On several occasions, this meant spontaneously extending the time windows of the conversations in the small groups by a few minutes so as not to break off the very personal exchange too quickly.

The third phase of the event could only touch on the question of possibilities for action, given the overall abundance of topics. Organizations that continue to implement such suggestions are probably important. It is to be hoped that the participants, who were sensitized and interested in the topic of loneliness in the different generations through the event, will explore possibilities of engagement, will be motivated to do so, or will be inspired to do so.

Feedback from the participants on this

To prevent loneliness: What inspired you, what ideas do you take away?

- Do! Take action yourself; seek out like-minded people.
- Thinking something positive
- Do something yourself
- I am responsible for myself
- To attract participants, benefits must be apparent
- Trips
- Be more open, rethink old patterns
- "Volunteering prevents loneliness"; linking hospice service and youth
- activate people, get involved yourself

The feedback of several participants "it was very informative" shows that impressions and knowledge on the topic of loneliness and ideas for action could also be taken away.

The contact and exchange with people of other generations was described as particularly enriching.

Did you discover/learn anything special new about the other generations?

- Influence of new digital media
- That there are similar problems across generations
- How young people think
- Engaged youth
- Loneliness + cry for help among young generation
- The will and motivation to build the future
- Basically, perceptions and impacts do not differ
- Young people expect "benefits" when they do something, get involved
- View of loneliness of the young
- Did loneliness even exist in the past? Is it a new phenomenon? View of others
- Our youth should be focused on more- storytelling café of generations
- I have often had bad experiences with the older generation, but today I was able to experience how nice everyone is and that not everything is going well with them either.



A feedback of a participant is listed here as a final remark:

"Don't stop bringing young and old together. Keep talking!"