

# Report of the intergenerational citizen summit "Loneliness" of the euPrevent PROFILE-project Hasselt

16.02.2023 - 18.30 - 22.30 h

Organisation: Logo Limburg in cooperation with Samana Limburg and the project group euPrevent Profile



Lonely? Let's unite!

## Report content:

### Procedure, impressions, reflections, results

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## 1. Who and where? Participants and location

On Thursday evening, 16 February 2023, 11 participants aged between 18 and 78 met in Hasselt. Based on the concept of "intergenerational dialogue events on the theme of loneliness", they spent 4 hours together to discuss the concept of loneliness within different generations. The group consisted mainly of 4 participants aged 20 and the others were over-60s. Nevertheless, the group was heterogeneous and diverse.

Recruitment took place via mail, phone, via Samana, Kazou, youth service city of Hasselt, youth service Zonhoven, youth associations, PXL, the LOGO Limburg network, youth council Diepenbeek,...

Limburgs main partners in this are:

- Logo Limburg
- Samana
- Okra

Participation was free. Participants were served sandwiches and fruit salad during the break.

The space for the dialogue event was the Demersite in Hasselt. Flipcharts, beamer and laptop were provided. The use of a sound system was not necessary.

## 2. How and what? Structure of the event and content results

The event was divided into three parts, as suggested in the guidelines for such intergenerational events and as had been made clear in the invitation to all participants.

- Connecting with each other
- Addressing the topic of loneliness
- Developing ideas for action

In the total time of 4 hours, 2 breaks were planned. A longer one to eat a sandwich together and a shorter break for fruit salad.

### Getting in touch with each other

After the welcome, where participants received a name tag, Frank Willems of Logo Limburg provided opening remarks and a number of practical arrangements were made.



To introduce participants to each other as well as to the topic, several methodologies were used.

First, an interactive introduction in the circle was provided: participants introduced themselves using a chosen photo and told something personal about themselves and what they were looking forward to that evening.

After this round of introductions came the age exercise: participants were instructed to line up from young to old. This showed that the group ranged from 18 to 78 years old. These exercises created connection in the group and a confidential atmosphere.

In the following introduction, participants were asked whether they came into contact with the issue of loneliness professionally, as volunteers or privately. The majority of participants attended as volunteers. 5 of the participants are (have been) professionals within this theme.

After this round, the group was asked the following question: "How lonely do I feel? How much loneliness have I experienced myself?" Participants could assign themselves the criteria "never, rarely, often, a lot". Most of the group placed themselves between "rarely and often". The facilitator used this arrangement to briefly explain: no one is on "never", everyone has experienced loneliness in one way or another. And: it takes courage to stand for "often", as the subject is often taboo and surrounded with shame in our society.

The moderator pointed out with great appreciation that there were 60 years between the youngest and the oldest.

After this exercise, the concepts of loneliness and social isolation were framed by Frank Willems.



## Discussing the topic of loneliness

The second part of the evening focused on the participants' own experiences of loneliness. First, the whole group was divided into 2 groups of 6 people. The moderator made sure the four young participants were spread out.

Intense conversations took place during the 20-minute storytelling phase in the mixed generation groups. These were deliberately not documented to let all attention go to good listening.

Then everyone went into generation-specific groups (young generation and older generation). In it, the following question was central: "What did we become aware of in the storytelling rounds about loneliness in our own generational group?" Participants wrote this down on flaps. The intensity of the discussion in this round showed the value of exchange within the familiar peer group (group of equal generations).

After this thematic phase, all groups were given the opportunity to briefly look at and record the notice boards of the other generational groups as a group.

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



## Content result of these working phases

### What is loneliness: Age 18+

- Loneliness among the elderly: there used to be more to do around club life (brass band,...). People committed themselves, made time for it and did so on a voluntary basis
- Loneliness among the elderly: there used to be more meaningfulness: church was a fixture.
- Loneliness among young people: there is pressure to do things but there is not always a connection with the group. The offer is too big and we are pushed more in a certain direction. You often end up in a different group of people. There is less togetherness.
- Example: thinking about the repurposing of a church does not attract young people
- Individualism: no more voluntary commitment.
- Less fixed values, less connection, less togetherness
- Search for identity
- Loneliness absorbs a lot of energy. It makes you hurt or angry. Your self-worth drops, your energy levels plummet; it is a form of rejection. Fear of failure.
- It is exactly a societal expectation that young people should have lots of social contacts. Young people quickly compare themselves and if they have fewer friends, they seem to have failed then loneliness grows.
- Loneliness does not always equal being alone. Being alone can really be ok.
- When you go to school or work, you have a certain structure and a lot of fulfilment. When you retire, you have to fill your time by yourself and you have more time to feel lonely. Tip from the older generation: start very early to make connections through associations. Time: how do you experience it? What do you expect? How do you fill it? Expectations don't match what it really is.
- Older and younger people have a different interpretation of time: you should not procrastinate until you are retired.
- Personal search for identity. Continues throughout your life: who am I when the children leave home, when I retire
- Corona was pernicious for club life.
- Older people: more social loneliness, more visible. Young people: emotional loneliness
- Perception about older people: isolated, we are often patronising towards older people, not being engaged anymore. What is an elderly person still willing and able to do??

### What is loneliness: Age 60+

- Going for an item connection and not age connection, intergenerational projects
- Belonging somewhere is important, expectations matter
- Social media are quick and fleeting contacts but physical contact gives connection
- Not being asked more as older people is difficult
- Architecture makes loneliness rise. Now the façade is being made.
- Cohousing
- Fleeting contacts are ok

At the end of this part of the citizens' summit, participants were invited to share in pairs what touched them most in discussing loneliness together.



### Ideas for action for intergenerational projects to reduce or prevent loneliness

For this activity, plenary explored the various questions on developing ideas for concrete actions against loneliness.





### The following suggestions emerged

- Every five years, there is a musical in Geel with 300 volunteers between the ages of 6 and 90 with 17 performances of 1,000 viewers. As a result of this project, they also find each other intergenerationally
- Project on art, mental vulnerability and art between young and old
- Okra member magazines at home
- Seniors' Council, 38 seniors' associations with about 300 members per association: they call 85+ in a kind of meter-petership
- Getting young people to volunteer in retirement homes
- Getting young and old to work on 1 common goal
- F.e. brass band: young and old take part. Keep enthusing young people in order not to drop out
- Neighbourhood project: young people from the vocational school will plant plants for the elderly
- Shortage in childcare: getting older people to help or be reading parents, cutting fruit, etc.
- Getting young and elderly people to exchange skills/expertise
- The mentally vulnerable remain a challenge for the professional network
- Foreigners in a rest home: help with interpreting
- In allotment projects: young and old and immigrants and natives  
In Turnhout: volunteers give training in various organisations: how to recognise, identify and discuss loneliness
- Everyone involved with older people: how to fertilise each other (Turnhout-Denmark-Norway-Netherlands)

### 3. General review and findings

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 recruitment of younger participants in particular needs to be done with great care.

Overall, the dialogue was judged very successful from the participants' point of view, as reflected in the feedback. All participants participated in the event with great openness, concentration and eagerness to learn.

#### Feedback of the participants

##### About the dialogue between generations

From the organiser and facilitator's point of view, the underlying concept of a dialogue event (as described in the guideline) worked well. The good framework conditions, such as the venue, a comprehensive 4-hour schedule, a delicious fortifying meal, contributed to a good learning atmosphere and the intensive cooperation of all participants.

It also became clear how much the topic of loneliness affects some participants emotionally and how important it is to have a familiar environment for exchange and good group support.

The third phase (concrete actions against loneliness) could not be discussed in depth due to time constraints and the promise of timely completion.

We make the suggestion here to continue working on it with participants who wish to do so at a later date.

##### Feedback of the participants about this:

The contact and exchange with people from other generations was described as particularly enriching and worth repeating.



### Summary evaluation forms

**1. Report number:**

Number 7	Number 8	Number 9	Number 10
2x	4x	3x	1x

**2. Interesting:**

Little bit interesting	Very interesting
2x	8x

**3. Heard anything new?**

- Link to young people
- Young people compare themselves to develop identity sometimes this is "loneliness"
- Various types of loneliness

- A lot about loneliness
- Engagement young people
- Young people's perceptions, importance of expectations
- All because came here without knowledge
- Older people sometimes feel they have been written off
- Developing identity is a lifelong process
- Factors and types of loneliness, personal stories, links
- Perspective from older people/ yet different from what you just assume

#### **4. Change anything on this meeting?**

- Shorter
- Keep as it was
- Not too late (2x)
- We often talk about the same information discussed and so there is little room for new inspirations
- Film about the elderly might be interesting to show