Report of the intergenerational citizens' summit "Loneliness" of the PROFILE project

Kerkrade

14.11.2022 - 16.00 - 20.00

Organiser: Municipality of Kerkrade i.c.w. Project Group euPrevent PROFILE

Lonely? Let's unite!

Report content:

Procedure, impressions, reflections, results

1. Who and where? Participants and location

On Monday afternoon, 14 November 2022, 25 participants aged between 20 and 93 met in Kerkrade. 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 over-60s although the plus-40s were also well represented. With two 20-year-old participant, young people were less well represented. Nevertheless, the group was heterogeneous and diverse.

Recruitment was done through intensive verbal publicity and through the local network partners of the municipality of Kerkrade in the weeks and days before the event.

The main partners of municipality of Kerkrade in this are:

- Social Support Advisory Council
- The Seniors' Council
- Youth Advisory Council

Participation was free of charge. Participants were offered flan and coffee on arrival and soup and sandwiches were served during the break.

The space for the dialogue event was the multipurpose room Patronaat. Flipcharts, beamer and laptop were provided.

The use of a sound system would have been another added value in terms of intelligibility.

Crossing borders
in health

2. How and what? Structure of the event and content outcomes

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.

- Getting in touch with each other
- Addressing the subject of loneliness
- Developing ideas for action

The total time of 4 hours included a break for coffee, as well as a longer break for a simple meal, as the event continued until 8pm.

Getting in touch with each other

After a reception and welcome address, where participants received a name tag, Kerkrade alderman Jo Paas provided opening remarks and a number of practical arrangements were made.

Different methodologies were used to introduce participants to each other as well as to the topic.

First, an interactive introduction in the circle was provided: participants introduced themselves and told a personal characteristic about themselves. Participants with the common characteristic stepped along in the middle of the circle and so the next participant was designated.

After this performance round came the age exercise: the participants were instructed to line up from young to old. This showed that the group ranged from 20 to 93 years old. These exercises created connection in the group and a confidential atmosphere.

In the following introduction, participants were asked to indicate, by raising their hands, whether they came into contact with the topic of loneliness professionally, as a volunteer or privately. The majority of participants attended as professionals or volunteers.

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 73 years between the youngest and the oldest.

After this exercise, the concepts of loneliness and social isolation were framed. The group confirmed that it is quite possible for someone to be alone but feel fine about it. Loneliness can also occur when having a large network.

Crossing borders
in health

Discussing the subject of loneliness

The second part of the afternoon focused on the participants' own experiences of loneliness. First, the whole group was divided into 3 groups of 8 people. The moderator made sure the two young participants were scattered.

Intense conversations took place during the 20-minute narration 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 (younger generations, younger older generations, older generations). This focused on the following question: "What did we become aware of in the storytelling rounds about loneliness in our own generation group?" and participants noted 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 the notice boards of the other generational groups as a group and record them.

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

Crossing borders
in health

Content results of these phases of work:

What is loneliness: Age 20-45

- There are certain expectations in society (among young people especially influenced by social media) that create an image about being social, popular, busy ...being busy. Opposed to this is loneliness, being alone, being unpopular.

- Anyone can suffer from loneliness. It can occur at any age and at any level of education.

- May be associated with depression.

- Quality of contacts is also important. It may be fine that you have, in number, limited contacts but those that are intense, qualitative.

- Shame plays a big role: older generation does not discuss loneliness, they say they are not lonely.

- More openness among young people. Social media (app) makes it easier to

- say things that are on your heart. Easier to express it but that doesn't solve it. The plenary group even notes a duality here: it seems like it's easy to 'appt' about it and yet loneliness seems to be a growing problem.

- Pressure is high among young people. The 'corona era' has another negative effect in this. Young people also had far fewer social contacts during corona.

- Emotional openness: being able to share experiences is important in the approach.

- In Kerkrade, there is no connection with the town, too little to do for young people

- Individualistic society: things used to be included within the community, there is less of a sense of community now.

- Threshold fear: For both older and younger people, it is not easy to enter somewhere and participate in activities.

What is loneliness: Age 46-70

- Feeling alone and being alone are two different things.
- Not being able to share things. Life consists of telling stories. You cannot share your own story with others.
- Being alone within a group can also be a feeling.
- Should loneliness always be solved?
- Before the use of mobile phones, there were associations, church,... The time we live in now is different from 15 years ago. Why is loneliness present: appears much more, costs are high. Popular disease number 1 = loneliness.
- Loneliness because of various causes: divorce, illness, death,...
- Is loneliness personal. Do you experience that only for yourself? Is that personal?
- Not wanting to be alone versus not finding connection.
- Activities are mainly supply-oriented and not demand-oriented.
- Now we give a name to loneliness. It has always existed. It is being researched more and getting more attention as a result.
- On social media, everything seems perfect. Form of loneliness: I am not so perfect compared to what I see on social media.
- What can we do for someone? What does the person in front of me want: maybe he has no needs or wants at all.
- You can also experience growth. It can be about a stage of life.
- "Too tired to get out of the concrete". Stages in your life. It is not always resolvable and it can be healing to get through it. We don't always have to and can't/won't resolve it.
- Being together doesn't always have to cost a lot of money: going for a cup of coffee, hike...
- There is neither 1 solution nor 1 cause.

What is loneliness: Age 71-91

- Most people are lonely at times. This is often situational. For example, due to relocation, divorce,...
- Loneliness is part of life. Learning to cope with it is part of it.
- Person in loneliness must want to do something about their situation and must be willing to take a step towards a solution or accept a helping hand.

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, the group was divided into three small groups. In these groups, they went deeper into the different questions on developing ideas for concrete actions against loneliness.

The following suggestions emerged Group 1

- Week against loneliness:
    - combining youth and elderly
    - residential elderly day care
    - restaurantopentoall
    - keep activities orderly with not too many participants, small- scale is safer, neighbourhood-oriented. Conditions (large) space, volunteers who can carry it.
- Classical music and Disney films: elderly people recognise music from films. Snacks and drinks can be offered here. Locations should be suitable and easily accessible.
- Older people go to venues where young people meet.
- Summary:
    - food, drink and music connect people
    - establish links with existing organisations
    - elderly move to locations where young people are known

Crossing borders in health

Group 2

- Young people are making the move to locations familiar to older people.
- Sharing experiences about history. For example: telling about the mining past: connecting young and old, telling about the environment and history via 'speaking engagements' but also about contemporary topics e.g. social media: learning from each other.
- Gardening together, e.g. to care facility where there are many spaces that are unused: sharing knowledge regarding biology, food and drink, cooking together, BBQ...
- Going to Pinkpop together: music connects.
- Getting everyone on board, getting everyone there, making threshold as low as possible, accessible to everyone.
- Sharing knowledge between young and old about fishing.
- Continuity: repeat activity that is found to be good also regularly so that it becomes ingrained.

Group 3

- Youth is digitally savvy: elderly go on tablet with their questions, computer,... visit school. Frames within education, a kind of social apprenticeship.
- Waving stones (under development in Kerkrade): route to the school, on recognisable stone on the path wave to an elderly person who is at home. This promotes contact in the neighbourhood.
- Ambassador in the community: young people who can go to an older one, make links.
- Work together on tools, internship hours, fit into existing concepts. Link with schools.

Crossing borders
in health

3. Overall assessment and findings

The experience leading 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.

Recruitment, especially of younger participants, should be done with great care.

Overall, the dialogue was rated as 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 from participants:

On intergenerational dialogue

From the perspective of the organiser and facilitator, 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 reinforcing 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.

Here, we make the suggestion to Kerkrade's already well-developed 'elderly' operation to engage further with participants who wish to do so at a later date.

Feedback from participants on this

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