

# Report of the Intergenerational Citizens' Summit on Loneliness - PROFILE Project Municipality of Thimister-Clermont

10.28.2022 - 5h30 - 9h30 pm

Organizers : Municipality of Thimister-Clermont, Mutualité Chrétienne, ULiège



Lonely? Let's unite!

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## 1. Who and where ? Participants and location



In Thimister-Clermont, 24 people gathered around the theme of loneliness. The event was an intergenerational dialogue. During three hours, exchanges took place, opinions and questions were shared.

The group was mixed, composed of 15 young people, with 9 older people. Some were from the same family (e.g., grandmother with her two granddaughters). The recruitment of the participants was done through the network of the person in charge of the social cohesion plan (CCA, young people who animate courses). It should be noted that many intergenerational activities take place in the commune and therefore, many participants already knew each other.

It was agreed that sandwiches and drinks would be offered to the participants.

The room chosen for the dialogue was a very spacious and functional meeting room, with space for the sub-group work proposed during the meeting and for eating sandwiches during the break.

## 2. How and what ? Structure of the event and reflections

The meeting was thus punctuated by four distinct moments:

- A moment of meeting, to get to know each other and to introduce ourselves
- A moment to put into context what solitude is, what it is not, the difference with social isolation
- A moment of sharing in sub-groups to share one's vision of loneliness, what this term can cover
- A moment to share good ideas, good experiences that worked, points to remember and interesting places

In total, the event lasted 4 hours with a 25 minute break for sandwiches.

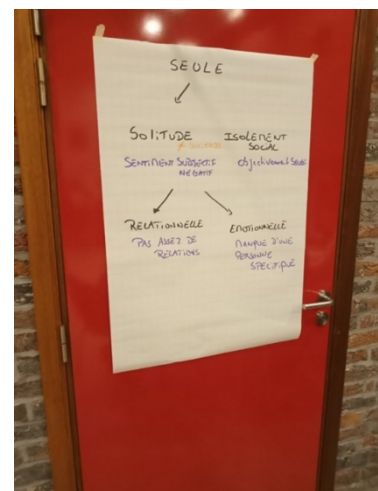
### Meeting each other

After inviting people to sit down, a brief explanation was given about the context of this meeting and what the PROFILE project is. The objectives of the evening were outlined and participants were asked if they agreed to be on a first name basis, which they agreed to.

In order for the participants to get to know each other, different questions were asked and everyone was asked to go to one side of the room or the other, depending to their answer (e.g., on the left, those who live in the city, on the right, those who live in a village; on the left, those who have already suffered from COVID, on the right, those who have never had it; on the left, those born before 1977, on the right, those born after). A round table discussion followed where each person was able to introduce themselves (first name and a passion).

### Discussing the theme of loneliness

For this second part of the meeting, distinctions and clarifications were made. A definition of loneliness and isolation was given. These terms were compared and their points of convergence and divergence were clarified. The participants were very interested in these explanations, not always preserving well the nuance between these two terms. Overall, following the exchanges, the participants agreed with the definitions given and they served as a basis for the rest of the meeting. One participant mentioned that she recognized herself in the definition of emotional loneliness since the death of her husband.



## Sharing in sub-groups

Next, the participants were asked, in sub-groups of the same generation, to discuss their own vision of loneliness and what this term covers: they were asked to share 3 elements that they wanted to communicate about loneliness. Four groups were created: two of young people and two of older people.

For 30 minutes, the participants were able to talk about loneliness in general, but they were also able to share their personal experiences and their own difficulties. These discussions were not documented in order to let the participants relate their personal experiences to each other. Many ideas came out of this moment of reflection.



In the pooling, different points were raised:

### Older groups

- Even in a nursing home, while surrounded, one can feel lonely
- When you are single/widowed/separated, when you are invited by friends, you feel like you are “a fifth wheel”
- Sensory difficulties (e.g., vision problems) also lead to a heightened sense of loneliness
- Personal feelings related to obstacles (e.g. money, health, stopping work, seasons...)
- This can lead to other feelings (e.g. anger, sadness) and create dependencies (e.g. alcoholism)
- It can create a devaluation, a feeling of uselessness
- Very personal (everyone has their own tolerance threshold)
- Ambivalence: sometimes we smile, we go towards others but we don't necessarily feel good

## Youth groups

- Feeling of loneliness at home due to a feeling of incomprehension on the part of parents
- Voluntary isolation to escape reality, creating loneliness
- Loneliness related to the death of a family member or friend, or the loss of a loved one (e.g., moving away)
- Loneliness is subjective: a death will not lead to the same feeling of loneliness depending on the person
- Being young, they are at the maximum level of social relations but some are rejected for example because of their social class. This led to a common reflection among the participants on the wearing of uniforms in schools, which can erase economic differences.
- Loneliness related to change such as a move (e.g., parents are in a relationship, make the choice to change while the child undergoes the change alone)
- Tell themselves that they are in a good position, that they can complain less about what the elderly are going through (widowhood, institutionalization...)
- The smartphone creates relationships and at the same time prevents them from reaching out to others in reality

## Ideas for action for projects (intergenerational or not) aimed at reducing or preventing loneliness



This third part of the evening took the form of a "talking wall": for 10 minutes, each participant had to pass in front of 4 panels and write down their ideas.

Ideas were to address:

- Project ideas
- Good experiences
- Places (already invested or to be invested)
- Points of attention: what should we be careful about

Afterwards, 4 intergenerational groups were formed to synthesize the different elements, to think about the ones they wanted to put forward and if they wanted to add more.

A pooling was then made, here is what came out of it:

- Project ideas, ranked by the participants as the easiest to the most difficult to achieve:
  - Day at the museum
  - Sponsorship (pairing of children and residents with activities to carry out)
  - More frequent intergenerational meetings (e.g.: distribution of cognoux to elderly and isolated people, currently only once a year with a long list so they cannot stay with each other for very long)
  - Integration week in a family
  - New intergenerational neighborhood
  
- Places
  - Cinema (adding a debate to bring about an exchange), fishery, Val Dieu
  - School: elderly people coming to testify
  - Vegetable garden in a neighborhood
  - Games: inter-neighborhood games, board game night
  - Neighbors' party
  - Theme evenings (e.g. dinner where we can discuss a particular subject)
  
- Points of attention
  - Intergenerational interest: some people do not want to exchange, both generations must find an interest in it (it should not be a one-way street)
  - Listen to each other, share, dialogue: importance of good communication
  - Experience and personality: e.g., two shy people can be more complicated - create an activity to facilitate communication (e.g., a treasure hunt)
  - Disability/illness: these people are less often included
  - Beware of financial access
  - Fear of judgment
  - Overloaded schedule: if a date is set in advance it may be easier (e.g. every first Saturday of the month)
  
- Good experiences



Note that many activities are linked to a rest home (negative point: people from the village are more often neglected)

Classification into two categories:

1) We do the activity at the person's home (for those who have difficulties to move):

- Sport: a young person goes to a person's home to teach them a sport
- Doing an activity via a video call
- Day care center in a nursing home
- Intergenerational housing (with students it is complicated in a village so here it is more for young workers or young couples)
- Visit/talk with the residents of MR

2) We do the activity outside:

- Walking
- Fishing
- Bowling
- Solidarity coffee

A reflection raised that the subject of loneliness has deviated to only the intergenerational: interesting but not sufficient. Another remark: in the intergenerational, it brings different people all the time, instead it should be a more durable link.



### 3. Evaluation and general conclusions

For the preparation of this meeting, the help of the person in charge of the social cohesion plan was very precious: he brought the participants, thanks to his network and to the previous activities carried out in the commune.

On the whole, the dialogue was very dynamic, the two generations were able to exchange and talk together about the theme of solitude.

#### **What do I want to remember about this meeting?**

- The young people are great
- Nice organization, nice exchange
- Reunion with some of the young people I met during a trip to the sea
- Didn't ask questions about loneliness and this will give rise to reflection

#### **What are your frustrations regarding this meeting?**

- Questioning how to free up time for concrete projects as it was discussed at the meeting

From the organizers' point of view, the event worked well. The atmosphere was very good, there was a spirit of cooperation and goodwill and a lot of energy. We hope that the participants go home with the desire to get involved, to learn more and to become aware of the subject of loneliness among the different generations.