



## 5 | How to enthuse a local community?

"I noticed that as a daughter I am already doing a lot of things in a good way, but it is so valuable to learn how I can actually do just that little bit better to be able to be there even more for my father with dementia."

Participant of the 'Gedragsgenerator' intervention, coping with changing behavior through role play, in the Netherlands

A dementia-inclusive society is a task for everyone. It is a place or culture that is committed to work together and promote a better understanding of dementia, raise public awareness and facilitate social inclusion. **For people living with dementia, it is important to prevent social exclusion and therefore keep triggering their senses at different levels.** Art and cultural activities can play an important role in achieving this. A cultural activity or an art experience gives the person with dementia a feeling of inclusion for that moment and a better wellbeing on many different levels.

Living with dementia is challenging as it is, but by engaging communities and helping each other, an environment can be created where people with dementia and their relatives will be more supported and accepted just as they are. A connected and engaged community where people work together, is more resilient and better equipped to deal with certain situations and problems. **The challenge in this is involving the local residents in the dementia-friendly part and discovering what they can and want to contribute.** It starts with togetherness and awareness: together we can ensure that vulnerable people continue to count and participate! But how do you enthuse the local community to be part of this (Van der Klein, n.d.)?



Expertisecentrum Dementie Vlaanderen (Belgium) - Cera © leodebockphotography.com

## 5.1 | Get to know the neighbourhood

The starting point is **taking a close look at what is already being organised in the community** for people with dementia and what is the scope, like (cultural) activities, trainings in the field of dementia, care facilities and volunteer opportunities. How many residents does the neighbourhood have? What are their ages and backgrounds? What does the daily routine look like? What questions do they have? Are they aware of how people with dementia can react and behave? Do they have experience with people living with dementia and would they be interested in receiving information or participating in a workshop?

Look for the answers to these and other questions. Put on your shoes and hit the road! Start a conversation with, for example, the elderly in the coffee corner of the supermarket, the parents on the schoolyard and the youth at the playground (Salih, 2016). Also, look at the kind of stores there are in the neighbourhood and if the retailers are aware of how to interact with people with dementia. If there are cultural activities being organised, did the staff have a training or workshop so they know the things to consider regarding visitors with dementia? Remember that the resident is not one target audience. **Vulnerable people are different in backgrounds, so keep these differences in mind.**

## 5.2 | Awareness

While exploring the neighbourhood, it is important to find out the level of awareness and knowledge the community members have regarding dementia. **Try to involve the whole neighbourhood:** residents, shop keepers, cultural and civil society organisations, professionals, local decision makers, relatives, caregivers and people with dementia. To increase the awareness role play can be used but also info-commercials on television or social media. It can be integrated in a local play or acted out on the streets. Stories of people with dementia, relatives or professionals can be printed in local papers to create awareness.

## 5.3 | Right location

It is important that you are on the right location to get in touch with the local community members. For some, the threshold is too high to go to a meeting in the townhall while the community centre around the corner is more accessible. **Ask cooperation partners what the meeting points are in the neighbourhood for your target group.** Examples of cooperation partners are neighbourhood teams, local governments, health and social care organisations, religious institutes, childcare, community centres or contacts within your own network. Tailor your locations to the variety of target groups involved and be creative (Bereiken en betrekken, 2020).

## 5.4 | Connecting and empowering

Considering the points above, try to connect people from different target groups to create more awareness of including people with dementia in an active manner. **Get people together to connect, share stories, share knowledge, ask questions and share ideas.** A shopkeeper can talk to a person with dementia to find out how they are feeling in a certain situation, while a neighbour can talk to the caregiver about their personal experiences. This can inspire people to help in their own way and within their own possibilities. It might also inspire a person with dementia and their relative to reach out for help. It can strengthen the collaboration and communication between all involved. By including people with dementia in this whole process, professionals and other community members become more aware of their needs and wishes. Including people with dementia also means empowering them, recognizing they are still part of the community.

## 5.5 | Neighbourhood communication

Participation and involvement of residents in a community is a goal of most local governments. Communication with the neighbourhood may be the key to success in this. People



Culture Club having a city walk (Denmark), © Birgitte Vestergaard

can only give their opinion and act on it if they are well informed. Local governments use various ways for communication, like websites and local newspapers. These resources are effective for a certain target group. But **how do you ensure that you reach the right community members?**

Here are five examples of other ways of communication  
in the neighbourhood

1. **Street interview:** you can place an advertisement in the local newspaper, but you can also actively look for information through a street interview. Talk to the people on the street and ask questions about relevant things. The advantage is that when they get to know you, you will become a familiar face in the neighbourhood.
2. **Connect with (existing) events:** neighbourhood meetings, with a central theme like keeping the neighbourhood clean of safety, are sometimes organized by the local government. Engaged community members often attend these meetings. To reach

others, it is better to participate in an (existing) event. Arrange an attractive (but modest) stand with the necessary information and actively engage in conversations with the people.

3. **Neighbourhood app:** WhatsApp is increasingly being used as a means of communication. In addition, there are more apps that make it easy to communicate with the local community, for example the apps *Nextdoor* or *Hoplr*. Townhalls also use these apps to share relevant information, post invitations or to ask a question. Everyone can decide for themselves which information they want to respond to. These apps were originally intended for communication between community members.
4. **Wall:** with a neighbourhood project you want to collect the ideas and opinions of the local community members. You can use the usual neighbourhood panel or an online survey. But you can also use another, more creative way. Look for a suitable, outside wall. Think of the 'Wall of Love' in Paris to collect ideas and messages. Choose a spot where many people come and make it noticeable.
5. **Home visits:** this is a more personal way of reaching the community members. Ring the bell to collect ideas and share information. Think of it as kind of a 'kitchen table conversation', where you start a conversation in a very personal way. Find out what is going on in the community so that you can respond well to it (Vijf 'andere' manieren van wijkcommunicatie, 2020).



'A box with (your) stories' – Hunebedcentrum (The Netherlands) - A guide, three participants and videographer Janneke Annema, © HANNN

## 5.6 | Commitment

If you want to work with the local community members, it is essential that you **build and maintain a relationship of trust**. This takes time and you should not be too goal-oriented. The right attitude is important in building a relationship of trust:

1. **Work connecting (outreaching):** go out on the street and make contact with the concerning neighbourhood residents.
2. **Be culturally sensitive:** learn about the cultural values and backgrounds of the target group.
3. **Be open:** show interest in the other person and don't assume your personal norms and values (Bereiken en betrekken, 2020).

Take the time to get to know each other. Everyone involved can participate in their own field of expertise and interest. This creates a better understanding of the needs and wishes of people with dementia, the willingness and knowledge of volunteers and the possibilities regarding the available activities and local policies. To create a lasting commitment of the community and volunteers, it is important to keep communicating, listening to each other and share experiences. Offer training and information material, let them know the difference they are making and show your appreciation.

## List of references chapter 5

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